

The Role of Memory
in the Poetry of Douglas Dunn and Tony Harrison
with specific reference to elegy

by

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Abstract

The question at the centre of this thesis is whether or not the autobiographical memories we find in the poetry of Douglas Dunn and Tony Harrison merit consideration as more than human documentaries or nostalgic tales of the past. Remembering the familiar past provides both poets with the opportunity to confess feelings of grief (at the loss of a wife or parent) and unease (often caused by the appropriation of family life for poetry). Memory helps both poets to explore the origins of their poetic identities.

My approach combines close readings of individual poems (many of which have not been previously analysed in such detail) with awareness of the intertextual. I cite references made to famous elegies and suggest what has motivated both poets' use of their sources. Drawing on traditional elegies throughout – but especially in Chapters 1, 4 and 6 – I argue that Harrison and Dunn display elegiac tendencies in their treatment of personal memory almost as if to counter the consciousness of oblivion present in their imaginations. Making detailed use of Wordsworth's 'Essays upon Epitaphs' and Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', Chapter 1 argues that Harrison reviews a poetics of epitaphs in *V.*. In Chapters 4 and 6 it is argued that the figures, structures and motifs of elegy fragmentarily echoed in Dunn's poetry are deformations as well as celebrations of tradition; and that such figures, structures and motifs highlight a social consciousness displayed in the poet's relationship with the people he remembers, and in the readership he imagines for himself inside the text.

The thesis also emphasises attention to reader response. Delineation of the reader responses anticipated by Harrison and Dunn provides evidence for the argument that both poets are aware that their choice of familiar subject matter is contentious and that each desires to justify his choice. In Chapter 2 Harrison is shown as being preoccupied with several different manifestations of oblivion including literary records of extinction. Chapter 3 investigates his dramatic contextualisation of the consciousness of oblivion (especially as induced by the threat of nuclear war). Links between representations of memory in translation and elegy are established, and the nature of Harrison's public voice discussed with special reference to Greek drama. Further to examining Dunn's awareness of what is implied by 'translation' (Chapter 3), the penultimate chapter of the thesis (Chapter 5) analyses Dunn's memories of childhood and growing up, memories which have similarities with those of Tony Harrison. The study of narrative representations of memory in Chapter 5 suggests the fundamentally rural origin of Dunn's poetic identity, and his preference for a past contained in a natural environment. Additionally, the evidence provided by Dunn's early collections indicates that he is instinctively an elegist whose art matures, almost as if in preparation for his masterpiece to date, *Elegies*. The thesis culminates with a chapter on *Elegies* in which it is argued that Dunn's domestic contextualisation of mourning produces social and cultural meanings.

Preface

Throughout this thesis several abbreviations are substituted for titles of major texts by Tony Harrison and Douglas Dunn. These are listed below in the order of their citation.

- V: Tony Harrison, *V*, second edition (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1989).
 HSP: Tony Harrison, *Selected Poems*, second edition (London: Penguin, 1989).
 PR: Tony Harrison, 'Anno 42', *Poetry Review*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Autumn 1987).
 TS: Douglas Dunn, *Terry Street* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).
 LoN: Douglas Dunn, *Love or Nothing* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974).
 SKP: Douglas Dunn, *St. Kilda's Parliament* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981).
 E: Douglas Dunn, *Elegies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985).
 NL: Douglas Dunn, *Northlight* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990).
 DSP: Douglas Dunn, *Selected Poems 1964–1983* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).

References to *The School of Eloquence* are to Harrison's continuing (that is, still in progress) sequence of sonnets, parts of which have appeared in several of his books as well as magazines, and not just in *The School of Eloquence and other poems* (London: Rex Collings, 1978), which included the first substantial gathering of poems from it. The book which contains the most comprehensive selection from *The School of Eloquence* is the second edition (1989) of Harrison's Penguin *Selected Poems*. The sonnet sequence *Art & Extinction* and the elegy *A Kumquat For John Keats* are found in the same selection, abbreviated HSP.

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Introduction

The poems discussed in this thesis are mainly confessional. By 'confessional' I mean poetry which calls on a reader to listen to a poet's recreations of private and personal opinions and feelings. Some critics are suspicious about the value and poetic quality of autobiographical subject matter. The gist of such critical suspicion is that autobiographical confession does not make for good poetry, a view eloquently expressed by Donald Davie in his most recent critical book *Under Briggflatts: A History of Poetry in Great Britain 1960–1988*. In a sketch of the most important features of the poetry which has been written since 1960, he casts a troubled glance at Tony Harrison's 'confessional' enterprises and writes:

The trouble with all such enterprises – whether by Plath, by Lowell, or by Harrison is that the poetry asks to be taken in the first place as 'a human document'. The story that we read from *The School of Eloquence*, particularly as amplified in the *Selected Poems*, is indeed interesting and touching. But its interest is documentary, not intrinsic to its nature as poetry; and so we are bowled over on a first reading, but less so the next time, and the next. . . . Of course, since human appeal is so much more straightforward than poetic appeal, such poems and sequences of poems will be widely admired. And this has happened with Harrison, whose poems to and about his parents enjoy more repute than other unconfessional pieces, both earlier in his career and later, which in fact deserve more respect.^[1]

Central to Davie's argument about the troublesome nature of confessional poetry is his belief that the human responses stimulated in the reader by the poet's act of confession are not responses which can help the reader to evaluate the poetic quality of what he or she is reading. However, in this thesis I argue that personal expressions of feeling found in poetry can be read as more than 'human documentaries' and that the 'human appeal' of confessional poetry need not obfuscate the reader's evaluation of the art of poetry. By engaging with the interesting and touching memories of places and people that we find in Harrison's and Dunn's confessional poetry and later in their elegies, this thesis posits the argument that memory is the means by which both poets integrate human with poetic qualities and demand an equally integrated and evaluating response from the reader. One example from Tony Harrison will suffice to point to the connections made by the artist's confessional memory that I am concerned to show. 'Confessional Poetry', written for Jeffrey Wainwright, includes a dialogue between the poet and an imaginary critical reader. The poet imagines that he is forced by the reader to defend the truthfulness of his portrayal of his father:



When Milton *sees* his 'late espoused saint'
 are we sure the ghost's wife 1 or 2?
 Does knowing it's himself beneath the paint
 make the Rembrandts truer or less true?

*But your father was a simple working man,
 they'll say, and didn't speak in those full rhymes.
 His words when they came would scarcely scan.*

(HSP, p. 128)

Harrison's dialogue with the critical reader raises the issue of the value and possibility of capturing a real sense of personality in art. Clearly, the argument is focused around how these truths relate to real truths, and much will depend on how successfully the critical reader thinks the poet has articulated his memory of how his father spoke. Engaging with the cultured reader by making literary references is also a dominant hallmark of Harrison's poetry. His own literary memories are as important as the memories of a childhood spent in Leeds. Uniting these memories in a poem such as 'Confessional Poetry', the poet shows he is acutely conscious of the appropriation of poetry by those who say that his father's words do not scan. Harrison imagines that the reader will exercise a different criterion of judgement when he treats the working life of his father as fit subject for poetry. Despite imagining the intolerance of his cultured readers (the 'they' which recurs throughout his poetry represents the ripeness of discrimination) Harrison frequently makes literary references. Literary references immediately introduce discrimination into a text written by Harrison since literature was not important in his parents' lives. This thesis approaches Harrison's treatment of memory by considering the role that traditional literary representations of memory (in particular elegy) have to play in the poet's representation of childhood. By doing so I engage with the criticism and judgement which Harrison expects from the current cultural establishment as well as with the role of memory in past poetry.

In V. Harrison refers to an epitaphic landscape of dead workers and their forgotten pasts which the reader of poetry cannot fail to notice points out links between poetic language and absence or loss. (The workers buried on Beeston Hill have names like 'Wordsworth' and 'Byron'.) Harrison looks for links between the poetic appropriation of the language of the graveyard and industrial decay, and finds them in himself. By drawing on Wordsworth's *Essays upon Epitaphs* and examining the autobiographical content of the memory displayed in V. Chapter 1 explores the way in which Harrison creates a poetry in which the poet's responsibility for the memory displayed on an epitaph is transferred

from the inscribing of stone to the poet mindful of remembering as he stands on a grave-plot. Harrison draws on previous literary uses of memory in *V.* (especially Wordsworth's example) in order to reassert and reassess the critique of society with which the writing of epitaph has traditionally negotiated. In support of this argument I refer to the epitaphs mentioned in the elegies of John Milton and Thomas Gray. Emphasising such intertextuality, Chapter 1 asserts that Harrison's relations with tradition are intricate and complex. In a footnote to his discussion of figuration in Proust, Gerard Genette writes:

It goes without saying, in the case of Proust, that each example taken from the *Recherche* can produce . . . an endless discussion between a reading of the novel as fiction and a reading of the same novel as autobiography. We should perhaps remain within this whirligig (tourniquet).^[2]

There are several stories manifested in Harrison's representation of memory which can also be read as realities: they include the story of his life and how he became a poet, the story of his parents' lives, and other poets' elegiac accounts of loss. What is original in Harrison's treatment of memory is his use of an indistinct division between real and fictional memory to bring into the open issues of survival and self-assessment. Harrison presupposes the absence from historical records and poetry of the lives of workers. The act of writing *The School of Eloquence* (published in Tony Harrison, *Selected Poems*, second edition (London: Penguin, 1989), abbreviated as HSP) is in itself an attempt to try to redress this fact.

Much of Harrison's and Dunn's poetry is concerned with memories of periods when they lived in poorer environments, and examines the ways in which the memories of those experiences come through to the present and can affect the future. The general argument mooted in this thesis is that books like *Terry Street* (Douglas Dunn, *Terry Street* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), abbreviated as TS) and *The School of Eloquence* can be considered to be more than 'human documentaries'^[3] and can be regarded as good poetry because they manage to make the primary attachments which poets feel for family and friends refer to more general issues. This has already been pointed out by Jeremy Hooker, who praises the power of contemporary poetry to reflect yet go beyond social criticism:

I believe that poetry which concerns itself – in Heaney's words – with both the matter of England and the question of what is the matter with England shows that feelings are complicated. . . . The poets differ in their interpretations of the history they have lived, or are living, but what all show is that the historical sense is rooted in the poet by the forces making him what he is: it may be diagnostic, or provide an overview, but it always works through primary attachments and emotions.^[4]

Strong personal 'primary attachments and emotions' are evident in *The School of Eloquence*. Harrison's representations of his father involve 'understanding of my feelings

about my relationship with him', an activity in which the poet becomes 'related to historical struggles between classes'.^[5] A prominent feeling in Harrison's relationship with his father is a rebellious loneliness, exacerbated by the fact that he chooses to commit himself to the identity of a poet by precocious reading at an early age. Harrison's rebellious loneliness is related to historical struggles between paternalistic authority and revolutionary groups dedicated to changing the *status quo*. The solitary poet's feelings of being a rebel come to the fore in poems such as 'A Good Read'. Remembering his childhood reading and his father's suspicion of it makes the poet feel resentful, resentment which is related to a more detailed analysis of resentment of political authoritarianism in a sequence of sonnets like 'Curtain Sonnets'. When his father voices his doubts about the activity of reading ('*ah sometimes think you read too many books. / ah nivver 'ad much time for a good read*') Harrison responds with:

*Good read! I bet! Your programme at United!
The labels on your whisky or your beer!
You'd never get unbearably excited
poring over Kafka or King Lear.
The only score you'd bother with 's your darts,
or fucking football...*

(All this in my mind.)

(HSP, p. 141)

Harrison's resentful tone ('*fucking football*') arises from the fact that every time he reads he is brought up short by his father's scepticism and faced with his own isolation. At the same time that the poet's consciousness is full of resentment, Harrison also displays a mindfulness of silence surrounding his father's opinions on art. The poet with '(all this in my mind)' is hesitant of putting the memory of his father's attitudes into poetry. However, the nature of the silence in 'A Good Read' is paradoxical, Harrison being both mouthpiece for his dead father's life and position on the arts, and silent creator imagining the dialogue which his father would have preferred. In 'Study' Harrison states that 'my mind moves upon silence and *Aeneid VI*' (HSP, p. 115) as if his reading could lead to some silent meeting with his family dead in the afterworld (Book VI deals with Aeneas' descent into the underworld). Such mindfulness of the silences surrounding Harrison's childhood reading and relationship with his father develops into the consciousness of oblivion which we encounter later in *Art & Extinction*. We can understand the oblivion in Harrison's consciousness more deeply by turning to the significance which the poet gives the memory of his mother in the creation of his identity as a poet. In an interview with John Haffenden, Harrison declared that 'the most formative linguistic part of your

life is the *mother* tongue, the early speech'.^[6] There are several moments in *The School of Eloquence* when Harrison remembers the education he had at his mother's knee. (This aspect of his poetry is addressed in Chapter 1.) However, memory is also a Mother who inspires poetry, and in a radio broadcast Harrison makes the connection between mother, memory, poetry and his consciousness of extinction. The poet specifically draws attention to memory's ability to be both mother and muse:

The remarkable thing that happens to our imagination since the invention of nuclear weapons is that the imaginary and the real become dependent upon the same facts because with the extinction of man and the extinction of his memory – memory you must remember was described by the ancient poet Hesiod as the Mother of the Muses – that upon that depends the aspirations, the sufferings of the distant past, and somehow by destroying the future we betray the sufferings, the aspirations, the creativity, the endurance of the past. Once human extinction is present in our imagination then we bear in our memory the responsibility for the past, we bear in the way we act, the responsibility for the future . . . responsibility to the action of the present by which we can ensure a human future in which things can be remembered.^[7]

Harrison deliberately talks about '*our* imagination', '*our* memory' [my italics], indicating that memory can also link reader and poet. In Chapter 2 I focus on the poet's consciousness of extinction posited in *Art & Extinction* (published in Tony Harrison, *Selected Poems*, second edition (London: Penguin, 1989), abbreviated as HSP), the elegy *A Kumquat For John Keats*, (published in Tony Harrison, *Selected Poems*, second edition (London: Penguin, 1989), abbreviated as HSP) and *Anno 42* (published in *Poetry Review*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Autumn 1987) abbreviated as PR). Harrison asks the reader to consider his or her response to the extinction proffered by the real threat of nuclear war. Chapter 2 argues that Harrison draws attention to the relationship between an artist and his audience to make it clear that a reader is responsible for whether or not a poetic text survives. Such an artistic concern is made to highlight the reader's responsibility for countering the awareness of 'human extinction' in 'our' imagination. I use the word 'oblivion' rather than extinction in the title of Chapter 2 because oblivion draws more readily on both the theme of the endurance of an artist's memory present in elegy, and literary definitions of extinction. Indeed, a poet who is aware that 'human extinction'^[8] is present in his imagination is especially suited for elegiac writing since elegy has been described as being 'specifically about what is missing'.^[9] The endurance of a poet's text after his death is a theme frequently found in elegy. Harrison thinks that such an idea was used in the past as consolation in poetry. Attempting to 'justify' *Art & Extinction* to John Haffenden Harrison claimed that the sequence was about 'the idea which used to

console people':

the idea that you can write in a certain style because some day there would be an understanding. Now the future doesn't look that much of a dead cert for gambling on: we are faced with a very real idea of extinction, not only of personal extinction but of the [poetic] work and of memory, and it certainly takes away that feeling that you were laying up a readership in heaven or the future. That choice, which in a sense sustained poets for centuries, is no longer available to us.^[10]

The consolation which Harrison achieves in his elegies is limited by the presence of 'human extinction'^[11] in his creative imagination; however the attachment of the poet to his personal past provides some relief. The paradox that 'extinction' is present in, and brought to mind by the workings of 'creative imagination' is something which Harrison is never tired of musing over.

In the sequence *The School of Eloquence* Harrison retains strong 'primary attachments and emotions' to the past he remembers. The domestic nature of these memories are surrounded and threatened by hostile and difficult environments. It is argued in Chapters 1 and 2 that the most valuable asset Harrison gains from working with the memories of his personal background is their capacity for suggesting love. Lovingly remembered experience turned to poetry is often Harrison's medium for responding positively to the many losses, absences and destructive forces present in his consciousness. He makes poetry from forgotten generations, nostalgia, the threat of oblivion that nuclear war offers, and the deaths of people close to him. However, Harrison is not a poet who believes in softening the sordid, disturbing or unpleasant impact that the retelling of these memories may involve. One of the most contentious points about Harrison's poetry has been his tendency to use highly selective memories of past experience and obscure accounts of events to craft his poetry; in the crafting he exercise his own sense of responsibility that goes with 'the way we act'.^[12]

Elegy was the daughter of Mnemosyne and Harrison's skillful development of loving memory to generate records of past human suffering in his elegiac writing is the natural culmination of his tendency to write poetry in which memory seems confession. In 'The Mother of The Muses' the poet suggests links between the loving remembrance of personal loss and the recounting of historical injustices performed by mankind. (The poem is an elegy written 'In memoriam Emmanuel Stratas, born Crete 1903, died Toronto 1987'.) Initially Harrison is motivated to remember in order to counter the inevitable decay of mind which old age brings:

Seeing the Home he's in 's made me obsessed
 with remembering those verses I once knew
 and setting myself this little memory test
 I don't think, at the moment, I'll come through.
 It's the Memory, Mother of the Muses, bit.^[13]

Harrison is frightened of the 'Home' in which his father-in-law died. The poem refers later to other inmates, and it becomes clear that the poet's fear is partly caused by his sensitivity to the fact that each resident's mind is being taken over by forgetfulness. One of these residents is Lilian, who is losing the coherence of her loving memory of her husband's funeral:

Lilian, whose love made her decide
 to check in with her mate who'd had a stroke,
 lost all her spryness once her husband died. . .
He had a beautiful . . . all made of oak
silk inside . . . brass handles . . . tries to find
 alternatives . . . *that long thing where you lie*
 for words like coffin that have slipped her mind
 and forgetting, not the funeral makes her cry.^[14]

Harrison's poetic consciousness is highly evident here. Funeral ritual associated with mourning gives Harrison's verse a formality which is threatened by fragmentation. Lilian's memory of her husband's funeral is punctuated with dots signifying her tongue-tied old age. Apart from mourning, pastoral and love lyric traditions are referred to in this stanza. The poet's description of Lilian's husband as 'her mate' relates him to the mock-pastoral which ends the poem: 'Country people used to say today's / the day the bird's sense spring choose their mates / and trapped exotics in the Dresden blaze / were flung together in their flame-fledged fates.'^[15] By making no attempt to disguise the presence of various poetic forms in his verse, Harrison risks the charge of being too self-conscious, of being more concerned with treating elegy as 'a helpmate in the contemplation of the tragic aspects of life'^[16] than celebrating a person dear to him who has died. The charge of excessive self-consciousness is levelled by David Constantine in 'A Strange Piety',^[17] a review of Harrison's *Selected Poems*. Chapter 3 attempts to confute Constantine by arguing that Harrison integrates personality and social and historical contexts, consequently fulfilling his desire to 'speak publicly as a poet'.^[18]

In *The School of Eloquence* personal memories of family rebellion merge with the poet's appreciation and reading of foreign language texts. Chapter 3 investigates how the portrayal of memory evident in Harrison's translations helps us to understand the development of 'a public voice' when he utilises personal instances of memory. In a recent

interview in *The Guardian* Harrison declared his interest in attempting to find a stance which would enable him to speak ‘publicly as a poet’,^[19] particularly through translations of dramatic works. Translation is a particularly relevant art for arguing that Harrison is not a self-obsessed poet even if he is obsessed with remembering. In translation the translator adopts responsibility for the continued remembrance of the artist he translates, he chooses to draw out aspects of the work he thinks are valuable, such as moments of dramatised memory. Studying the links between Harrison’s use of memory to counter oblivion in elegy and translation shows how important it is to identify exactly what significance a poet gives to different styles of writing. Comparing and contrasting the language of *V.* and *The Oresteia* with several citations of Greek drama in Harrison’s *Selected Poems*, I argue that the dramatic language present in Harrison’s poetry creates a stage for public speaking. Indeed, the dramatisation of poetic identity emphasises the staged effects of memory rather than the personal content.

Chapter 3 also provides my introduction to the poetry of Douglas Dunn and the writing styles which he has developed throughout his poetic career to communicate public themes; his results are different from that of Tony Harrison. Analysis of the way in which he dramatises moments of memory in *Andromache* demonstrates the preference for lyricism evident in his verse. My argument that Dunn works with memory partly because it can translate (move from one place to another) between the commonplace and numinous is supported by a detailed analysis of his use of the verb ‘translate’. This provides evidence that Dunn’s use of personal memories generates a more metaphysical discussion of society and the reader’s responsibility for countering oblivion than Tony Harrison offers.

* * *

At this point in the thesis I go back to the start of Dunn’s poetic career and examine how his poetic identity matures into that which informs *Elegies*. Reviewing *Terry Street*, Terry Eagleton praised Dunn’s ‘refreshed perception’ for its success at achieving a balance ‘between objective description and a more inward understanding reached through subdued metaphor’.^[20] *Terry Street*, discussed in Chapter 4, gives invaluable insight into the education and workings of Dunn’s poetical mind, revealing the importance of ‘reflection’ to his aesthetic awareness of reality. ‘Reflection’ befits an elegiac sensibility; indeed, elegy. Coleridge argued that elegy was a style of poetry ‘natural to a reflective mind’.^[21] By arguing that the solitary figure becomes emblematic of the poet’s identity among the people of *Terry Street*, I suggest that, although Dunn is isolated (isolation which implies the poet’s inevitable exile from his subject matter), he makes every effort to achieve con-

tact with his fellow men and women. Solitude is a state of existence common to the poet of elegy, and the combination of Dunn's solitude with the dejected 'reflection' on reality which we read in *Terry Street* hints that the roots of the successful elegiac art we find in his later work are present in this first collection. Coleridge proves an invaluable aid in assessing the elegiac nature of the reflection we find in *Terry Street*. His criticism anticipates a contemporary mindfulness of loss and feelings of 'extreme dejection':^[22]

Something is gained, if instead of attending to our sensations, we begin to think of them. But in order to do this, we must reflect on these thoughts – or the same sameness will soon sink them down into mere feeling. And in order to sustain the act of reflection on our thoughts, we are obliged more and more to compare and generalize them, a process that to a certain extent implies, and in still greater degree excites and introduces, the act and power of abstracting the thoughts and images from their original cause, and of reflecting on them with less and less reference to the individual suffering that had been their first subject.^[23]

The workings of Dunn's reflective mind in Part I of *Terry Street* are frequently pain-filled. However, the same act of reflection which implies pain goads the poet to deeper thought about his solitary role in the social environment he makes his subject. In Part I Dunn's reflective mind works on a social environment and in doing so offers a critique of the human documentaries being made by film crews in the 1960s. In Part II Dunn mocks the 'vanity' of the reflective mind which tries to characterise the poet's identity. Ordinary objects and everyday situations are abstracted and considered on a more philosophical and mythical level, but this is carried out with self-mockery which, it is argued, shows Dunn's heightened awareness that his writing may not be generally considered good poetry.

Fear of exclusion and the debilitating effects of exile haunt Dunn's poetry. In *Love or Nothing* and *St. Kilda's Parliament* Dunn's use of industrial and rural subject matter manifests both the poet's sense of exclusion from the literary establishment (because the choice of subject is not considered suitable) and his sense of exile from the places he grew up in and left in order to educate himself to be a poet. Industrial and labouring subject matter combined with the sense that such working life (industrial and the poets who write about it) has been consigned to oblivion by the adverse judgements of literary and social establishments, makes a dual study of both Harrison's and Dunn's writing fruitful. The link between the subject matter Dunn deals with in *Barbarians* and Harrison's poetry is not considered in this thesis partly because it has already been extensively noted by many critics and partly because of the restrictions of time and space which limit the range of research. Not wishing to cover similar ground too frequently was another reason to be selective and led to the exclusion of a detailed analysis of the lamenting woman figure in *Europa's Lover* (published as Douglas Dunn, *Europa's Lover* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books,

1982).

Unlike Harrison Dunn does not aim to publicly stage the events of the past in poetry by drawing on the language of drama. Instead the inclination of the story teller to embellish all experience in fiction is strongly rooted in Dunn's poetic art. Chapter 5 examines the workings of memory in Dunn's narrative poems. It is argued that the narrative in *Love or Nothing* (Douglas Dunn, *Love or Nothing* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), abbreviated as LoN) and *St. Kilda's Parliament* (Douglas Dunn, *St. Kilda's Parliament* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), abbreviated as SKP) is exploratory of the past. Indeed, Dunn's considered use of repetition and cross reference to previous collections of poetry supports Frank Kermode's idea that: 'Narrative certainly serves both to aid memory and to explain; those are its primary functions. But it also deals in oblivion and secrecy.'^[24] Dunn measures and ascertains the meaning of the memories held in the texts of landscapes; in the written and unwritten texts of the literate and illiterate. The narrative treatment of memory discussed in Chapter 5 invites comparison with the analysis of Harrison's consciousness of the 'human extinction' in his imagination offered in Chapters 2 and 3. Alan Robinson suggests that Dunn examines his roots as a 'Scottish working class poet'^[25] in order to counter the traditional oblivion working class Scottish poets are consigned to. His poetry recalls 'Young dead like Leyden, Smith and Gray / Unread forgotten', 'Burns, Fergusson, John Wilson, Tannahill' (SKP, p. 53). Recalling the memory of working poets Dunn reinterprets the history of political influence on Scottish culture by 'reacting against the subordination of proletarian talent'.^[26] The links between remembering forgotten historical subject matter and poetry which articulates or shows any sort of positive or negative awareness about death are as strong in Dunn's poetry as they are in Tony Harrison's. However, Dunn deliberately chooses historical examples which illustrate 'the forgotten anima of Scotland' (SKP, back cover).

In a recent review of *Northlight* (Douglas Dunn, *Northlight* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), abbreviated as NL), Dunn's latest book of poetry, David Profumo remarks on the metaphysical mood of the verse and the anomalies projected by the personal subject matter: Dunn is not concerned to provide slick formulaic answers in his verse, but to prise open the anomalies of personal and national identity.^[27] Clearly, Profumo considers that the power of Dunn's verse lies in its ability to record experience and also question that record. In *Elegies* (Douglas Dunn, *Elegies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), abbreviated as E) Dunn's inability to grasp the reality of his wife's death communicates the anomalies of a mind affected by a great sense of loss. Concrete references of the sort Harrison makes

to social class and historical devastation are conspicuously absent from *Elegies*. However, what connects these poems with the poems of *Terry Street* is the loving couple's isolation, a similar sense of exile seems to operate in both collections. Isolating himself from human society Dunn creates a realm of love. Many of the small gestures he makes to a world outside his marriage and experience of his wife's demise indicate that the poet imagines a literary world which is inimical to his attempts to express his love in poetry:

Why be discreet? A broken heart is what I have –
 A pin to burst the bubble of shy poetry,
 Mnemosyne revealed as what, in life, she stands for.

(E, p. 58)

The answer to the question proffered by an unseen reader (or by the poet to himself) shows Dunn's determination not to hide his feelings, but to openly express them in poetic and emotional language. However, the poet's reference to a mythical figure also displays his concern with tradition. Like Tony Harrison whose reference to the Mnemosyne myth proved to be a crucial way of approaching the origins of his personal and poetic identity, it can be argued that Dunn regards his wife both as companion in terms of the personal feeling he shared with her and as a 'Woman' figurative of 'life itself':

The most mysterious, unearthly lyric earns its beauty by virtue of having been written by a man or woman who experienced the sensations that the poem discloses. When we say 'man' or 'woman' we know what we mean: everything they do, everything that can happen to them; thoughts, feelings, events, controversies, transactions, delights and tragedies. 'Man' and 'Woman' mean not merely gender, but life itself. To treat either cipher with disrespect is to risk inhumanity.^[28]

Lesley Dunn's life is remembered as a 'good life' with much pain. Remembering his wife involves the belief that the poet, in order to write truthfully, must face up to the implications of his melancholy and mournful moods. The working of memory in *Elegies* has surreptitious links with traditional elegy, the poet's learning is kept in the background. At one stage Dunn records the words of his wife who says, "Write out of me, not out of what you read" (E, p. 26). Dunn's decision to subdue literary reference is partly due to the fact that he wishes the representation of his wife to be the main educating theme of his poetry.

Throughout his poetry Dunn is particularly sensitive to the activity of reading. The question, 'Why be discreet?' involves the reader directly with the issue of the function of expressing feelings in verse. The contemporary poet Peter Levi argues that the connection between a desire to be articulate about death and the presence of myth (or fiction) in

poetry is that both aim to fulfill psychological functions:

A second important function of poetry is to be articulate about death. The obvious examples are almost too many. This is the subject matter of the most terrible and direct of all Latin hymns, maybe of all Medieval poems, the 'Dies Irae'. And thirdly, there is the mysterious use of poetry which shadow-plays the return of human beings to their first justice, the vindication of mankind, the renaissance of antiquity, the resurrection of the dead. It is no more possible to exhaust this use of poems by verbal analysis than it is to pin down the psychological functions of mythology, to which of course I am referring. There is an excellent and strange example in Shakespeare's *Pericles: Prince of Tyre* in Act Three, Scene Two: the opening of the chest.^[29]

Levi is right to refer to Shakespeare although trying to explain uses of poetry which include the contemporary, because Shakespeare understood the power of memory. There is a debate in *Pericles* about the value of memory preserved in epitaphs and monuments and that more mysteriously preserved by love. The integrity of memory preserved by epitaphs is severely questioned. Dionyza tries to placate her husband's worries about the murder of Marina which they think has been successfully performed:

Dionyza. And as for Pericles, what should he say?
 We wept after her hearse, and yet we mourn.
 Her monument
 Is almost finished, her epitaphs
 In glittering golden characters express
 A general praise to her, and care in us
 At whose expense 'tis done.^[30]

The memory of Marina publicly expressed is one of praise and of a golden nature. However it is a memory built from hatred and jealousy, intended to exhibit the generosity and wealth of Dionyza. Shakespeare shows that there is a great absence of truthfulness in such a memory. There is a truth more real than the facts discover to us which needs explaining. When Marina meets Pericles a higher mystical truth is invoked. Marina slowly breathes life into Pericles' memories as she tells him her parentage and background. The mingling of dead and living memories produce a strange tension in Pericles:

Pericles. O, stop there a little!
 This is the rarest dream that e'er dulled sleep
 Did mock sad fools withal. This cannot be;
 My daughter's buried. Well, where were you bred?
 I'll hear you more, to the bottom of your story,
 And never interrupt you.^[31]

Something in Shakespeare is looking for a link between memory and dream, life and death, inspiration and story telling, fiction and reality, and finds it in Marina's 'story'; her narratives are 'acts of memory'.^[32]

One can compare Shakespeare's pursuit of such a link with Dunn's practice in *Elegies*, since much of the beauty of Dunn's poetry comes from the way he can smoothly exchange the commonplace and the numinous. Heightened moments (often marked by reference to another author) and simple observations are equally remembered. In 'The Sundial' Dunn examines the relationship of 'Time, love and literature!':

You stood with your back to me
By that crumbling sundial,
Leaving your book on it –
Time, love and literature!
You shielded your eye from the sun
As a peacock strutted towards you.

(E, p. 30)

His wife's back resists the poet's interpretation of the past by symbolising aloofness. Dunn's memory of her twists and turns in a way which emphasises the elusiveness of knowledge about mysteries, and confronts Dunn with the physical pain and horror associated with the cause of her death:

... a peacock strutted towards you.
You called it beautiful and touched its head,
Then turned around to me, eye-patched
And fastened to a mourning blink
Brought there by melanoma's
Sun-coaxed horrific oncos,
Leaving me to guess at
What mysteries you knew
Foretold by love or creatures.

(E, p. 30)

The desire to capture the loving and beautiful sensations associated with the memory of his wife combines with Dunn's hope that through doing so he can create poetry filled with visions of 'Time, love and literature!'. But the turn that memory takes within the poem shows that the memory of his wife is also associated with a 'horrific', artistically debilitating disease. The literal turn that the memory of his wife makes confronts Dunn with his loss and the cause of her death, 'fastened to a mourning blink'. Remembering this afresh leaves the poet guessing at the knowledge of mysteries he had hoped to reach

by looking at her presence through 'Time, love and literature!'. The links between the workings of memory and loss that this poem so beautifully exhibits shows how unpredictable memory is; how it can suddenly turn from joy to sorrow; and how elusive are the mysteries it tempts the poet to investigate. The tantalising sense of a 'Good' being just beyond the reach of understanding that memory creates is a particularly important cause of the grief Dunn expresses throughout *Elegies*. The fact that her 'book' is left on the sundial implies the links literature has with the memory of Lesley Dunn's and at the same time its incompatibility with her suffering.

Dunn often attempts to convince his reader of the metaphysical truths his memories contain as well as of their ordinary reality. The physical workings of memory evident throughout Dunn's poetry emphasise the poet's striving to use memory to suggest 'a Truth more real than the facts alone discover' which is separate from those facts. It suggests Dunn's sincere attachment to the real even while trying to go beyond it. Sensuality is employed throughout Dunn's poetry to emphasise the poet's belief that intensity of experience in this life touches on knowledge of 'something that's beyond':

...sight, touch, smell and sound
 Create the taste
 Of something that's beyond
 Quick understanding: dusk
 Rubs light against
 A cloudy pink,
 And sky's experienced
 Formations re-enact
 A Pictish beauty
 As the reflected West bleeds on the Tay;

(NL, p. 69)

Real landscapes and places in his poetry are thronged with mystical, fictional, and personal memories. The workings of these memories can be sensuous; they can search for something absent which is 'beyond / Quick understanding'. Chapter 6 argues that Dunn uses the lyricism of memory to communicate the idea that man is not psychologically trapped by his own memories. Although Dunn shows himself isolated from the world, the loving relationship he records is couched in figurative terms of sharing:

At night, I lay beside her in the unique hours.
 There were mysteries in candle-shadows,
 Birds, aeroplanes, the rabbits of our fingers,
 The lovely, erotic flame of the candlelight.

Sad? Yes. But it was beautiful also.
There was a stillness in the world. Time was out
Walking his dog by the low walls and privet.
There was anonymity in words and music.

(E, p. 14)

The 'anonymity' Dunn finds is not a result of forgetting or obliterating who he is, nor is it created by a loss of memory. Certainly, anonymity implies the absence of personality, but the nature of the poet's absence here is filled with the presence of another person and the conditioning circumstances which have provoked and produced the absence in himself; the regular activities of Time; the sadness induced by his wife's death; the beauty of the stillness which he feels.

Assessing Dunn's writing about his own memory and how he copes with loss as a solitary figure, is crucial if we want to truly understand his contribution to contemporary poetry. 'It was re-introducing personality into poetry'^[33] is a comment made by Dunn on the direction he felt Philip Larkin's poetry was guiding contemporary poets and is pertinent to his own poetry. Writing about the effects that memories of loss have upon his mind and artistic awareness constantly challenges the poet's faith that autobiographical subject matter is of a quality suitable for poetry.

This thesis intends, then, to show that Harrison's and Dunn's writing demands a qualitative response to the way their poetry integrates personal memory with mindfulness of social and moral existence. Both poets remember selected times from the past and examine the ways in which these come through to the present to affect the future. Each poet's deepest emotions are stirred by memories of their own origins (poetic and personal), but at the same time their deepest thinking is disturbed by the thought that such origins will not endure, or that their subject matter will not find a readership which will approve of their subject matter. Both poets are 'articulate about death'^[34] and aware of the threats of oblivion and loss present in their poetic consciousnesses. Most importantly, memory works in the poetry of Tony Harrison and Douglas Dunn to offer relief whilst heightening the consciousness of impending oblivion.

Chapter 1

A Poet in Search of an Epitaph

A 'poem of mourning occasioned by a specific death'^[35] was one definition of elegy offered recently by Peter Sacks. There is some question as to whether Harrison's *V.* can be described in these terms. Although one critic has described the poem as a 'long poem carved out of experience and the heartbreak of personal bereavement'^[36] (a point attested to by the poet's infrequent but impassioned memories of his deceased parents in *V.*), other critics have chosen to draw attention to Harrison's mindfulness of social issues. Christopher Frew argued that *V.* offered 'ruminations on the physical and mental wasteland of the industrial North East'.^[37] And yet, neither critical approach is quite accurate enough. *V.* begins with the poet's imagined death and becomes his search for a poem which will fulfill his desire to 'speak publicly as a poet'^[38] and yet also serve as his epitaph. Harrison stands in a distinctly urban (as opposed to pastoral) landscape of epitaphs memorialising his working class forbears, family and poetic peers. In this first Chapter I focus on Harrison's response to the epitaphs in Beeston Hill and ask how these epitaphs relate to Harrison's search for a poem which fully represents his life's work. An epitaph is an inscription on a tomb, a brief composition written on the occasion of a person's death, since Harrison is silent about exactly what is written on the gravestones he reads, I use the word to refer to the whole tombstone or grave, thus implying that the poet reads more than the visible inscription. Additionally, although *V.* may not be 'a poem of mourning occasioned by a specific death', asking how the traditional forms and figures of elegy relate to Harrison's treatment of memories of Leeds and his parents provides us with insight into why Harrison is at such pains to dictate his own epitaph.

The language of epitaphs has constantly fascinated poets, and it is no accident that Harrison plans that his own epitaph will fall opposite a working man who shares his name with William Wordsworth whose *Essays upon Epitaphs* 'form a notable contribution to Romantic poetics'.^[39] Throughout *V.* Harrison is interested in engaging with the strong influence of Wordsworthian treatments of memory and death. He establishes reference to Wordsworth's style and diction early in *V.*:

This graveyard on the brink of Beeston Hill's
the place I may well rest if there's a spot
under the rose roots and the daffodils
by which dad dignified the family plot.

(V, p. 7.)

Harrison's diction 'spot', 'place', 'daffodils', 'plot', make strong links with the diction used by Wordsworth to create landscapes suitable for epitaphs which preserve memory. For example, in 'I only Looked for Pain and Grief' Wordsworth finds a natural outlet for his feelings of grief and pain in 'the precious spot [which] is all my own'.^[40] In 'Inscription' he devises an inscription 'for the Spot where the Hermitage stood on St. Herbert's Island, Derwent-Water': 'This quiet spot.—St. Herbert hither came / And here, for many seasons from the world / Removed.'^[41] In *V*, 'spots' and 'plots' are cluttered with objects and at first sight resemble rubbish heaps. The decay evident within the spots and plots designated for Harrison's father's memorial in *V*, becomes an unusual outlet for the complex feelings which swathe the poet's relationship with his father. In addition the objects are linked with words which may be read as inscription; the 'petals' which strew the ground are associated with the words '*Here Comes the Bride*' (*V*, p. 23); the 'aerosol' with the graffiti which adorns the gravestones; the word 'HARP' on the 'HARP can' adds another word to the heap:

The ground's carpeted with petals as I throw
the aerosol, the HARP can, the cleared weeds
on top of dad's dead daffodils, then go,
with not one glance behind, away from Leeds.

(*V*, p. 26)

The issue of how poets remember familiar and personal pasts is an important one in contemporary poetry. In a subtle analysis of 'the idea of not looking back' in *Station Island* by Seamus Heaney John Kerrigan suggests that Heaney lets 'the past haunt him into poetry'.^[42] In 'The Underground' Heaney remembers a moment when he and his wife were late for the Proms. Heaney's use of the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale to represent his process of remembrance indicates the feelings of vulnerability (Hansel and Gretel are children abandoned in a forest) which Heaney associates with 'retracing the path back':

I come as Hansel came on the moonlit stones
Retracing the path back, lifting the buttons

To end up in a draughty lamplit station
After the trains have gone, the wet track
Bared and tensed as I am, all attention
For your step following and damned if I look back.

Harrison has travelled to Leeds to spend 'ten minutes' tidying his parents' grave-plot. Recording his determination to leave the place where he was born and brought up, Harrison leaves 'with not one glance behind', assertiveness which in updating the Orphic gesture

(Orpheus' look back for Eurydice arises from his intense love for her) seems to deny the poet's past. The poet's declaration that he will not give 'one glance behind' at his father's grave is, however, false defiance. He cannot throw off the memory of Wordsworth or his father easily, and as the poem unravels it is clear that Harrison would not wish to do so. Indeed, the objects strewn over his father's grave are emblematic of the major themes of the poem. Since the significance of 'petals' in *V.* is considered in Chapter 2 and the aerosolling skin is referred to frequently throughout this chapter, I will briefly consider the importance Harrison attaches to the 'HARP can'.

The HARP cans in Beeston Graveyard have been discarded by skinheads who get 'pissed on beer' (*V.*, p. 9) when Leeds United lose. Harrison suggests that their reason for drinking is to 'reassert the glory of their team / by spraying words on tombstones, pissed on beer'. Thus, the only time in *V.* that Harrison uses the word 'glory' is when a desire for 'glory' is stimulated by drink. When we consider that the skins' disappointment in their team leads them to the graveyard it seems reasonable to notice the comparative link with Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' where he writes 'The paths of glory lead but to the grave'.^[43] The distant literary echo shows a poetic mentality intrigued with the problem of understanding the motivating forces behind the skin's 'desecration' of graveplots; it is an interest which belies the poet's attempt to turn his back on the rubbish on his father's grave. Only when 'pissed' do the skins seek 'glory'; normally they could not care about achievement. Thus the empty 'HARP can' represents both the desire for achievement and consolation for the disappointment of failure. The choice of the word 'glory' and its echo of Gray's usage implies that the desire for 'glory' is rooted in poetic and social thinking. Indeed, in Harrison's most recent work *The Trackers of Oxyrhincus* alcohol is used by the more powerful characters as a sop to keep the lower orders in control. Apollo believes that the promise of alcohol will keep the satyrs at his beck and call. 'And soon you'll be free to drink till you fall, / the freedom it seems that you want most of all.'^[44] However, through the medium of the word 'HARP' on the beer cans in Beeston Graveyard, the beer drinking in *V.* mainly refers to the conflict of feelings arising inside a man from the disappointment of not achieving a desired end:

Half versus half, the enemies within
the heart that can't be whole till they unite.
As I stoop to grab the crushed HARP lager tin
the day's already dusk, half dark, half light.

(*V.*, p. 23)

The poet's stoop to grab the can emphasises the close relationship between poet and

skin. Indeed Harrison makes the link between skin and HARP can, poet and harp explicit when he laments his disappointment at being 'still years away from being skald or skin' (V, p.25), the Anglo-Saxon word 'skald' drawing directly on a tradition of poetry sung to a lyre. The 'HARP can' in V. is part of Harrison's attempt to manifest feelings of discontent and disappointment raging within his heart, whereas references to drinking and lyres in *Trackers* are clearly identified with social injustice – one of the causes behind Harrison's rage in V. In *Trackers* drinking and lyre-harp playing become emblematic of social and poetic class structures designed to keep lower and higher classes apart and in their place. Apollo's musical virtuosity (his instrument is a lyre-harp) was once challenged by a lowly satyr Marsyas who perfected flute playing. Because the satyr was good he offered a challenge to Apollo and was flayed alive for his presumption. Consequently lyre music is linked with tyrannical oppression and cruelty throughout *Trackers*. Silenus, a satyr who doesn't mind 'a bit of inferior status'^[45] tells us that 'wherever the racked and the anguished cry / there's always a lyre-player standing by'. The motifs which we find in Harrison's poetry are always worth studying as much for their contradictions as their emblematisation of major themes. Stooping to pick the 'HARP can' from his father's grave the poet grasps at an understanding of the skin's desire to desecrate and glorify, and his own uncertainty about his success as a poet.

The desecration of his family dead is not, however, something Harrison can report without a strong consciousness of literary tradition; returning to his father's grave he also tracks Wordsworth down. Both would be shocked by the 'savage violation'^[46] of the graveyard. Harrison's interweaving of Wordsworthian diction with his parents' grave plot is a strong clue to the respect he affords to them both although neither may accept his art (the skinhead jeers that Harrison's mother '*thought yer fucking poetry obscene!*') (V, p.17). Reading V. we have to recognise the many different yet mutually enforcing memories found on epitaphs and held within spots of ground. Whilst maintaining links with Wordsworth's graveyard diction the evident violation of grave plots and epitaphs on Beeston Hill places Harrison at odds with the most famous poet of memory; 'the workings of memory make their first fully subjective appearance in English literature in the poetry of Wordsworth'.^[47] In *Essays upon Epitaphs* Wordsworth emphatically states that places of burial are marked in order to 'guard the remains of the deceased from irreverent approach or from savage violation; and, secondly, to preserve their memory'.^[48] To stress the dramatic differences between Tony Harrison's and Wordsworth's treatment of epitaph I draw attention to several confutations of Wordsworth's opinions which V. displays and the consequences these have for the workings of memory in Harrison's poem.

A comparison of Harrison's sonnet 'A "scanty plot of ground"' with Wordsworth's sonnet 'I' of *Miscellaneous Sonnets* (where Harrison finds his title), not only helps us to understand Harrison's treatment of memory in a sonnet but also guides us into *V.* since the sonnet is almost identically reproduced in the first four stanzas of the later poem. Wordsworth finds consolation in fitting a broad scope of historical, metaphysical and autobiographical experience into the 'narrow room' or 'scanty plot' of sonnet form:

Nuns fret not at their Convent's narrow room;
 And hermits are contented with their Cells;
 And students with their pensive Citadels:
 Maids at the Wheel, the weaver at his Loom,
 Sit blithe and happy. . .
 In truth, the prison, unto which we doom
 Ourselves, no prison is: and hence to me,
 In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
 Within the sonnet's scanty plot of ground:
 Pleas'd if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
 Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
 Should find short solace there, as I have found.^[49]

The spaces of life measured out in this sonnet are prophetic of the grave ('narrow room', 'scanty plot of ground') and because of this we can treat the sonnet as a monumental structure celebrating the harmony of the religious (nuns), intellectual (students) and industrious (weavers). Indeed, John Kerrigan uses this sonnet to argue that: 'Wordsworth built his sonnets precisely for dwelling's sake. The sonnet was a space of ground in which being, for him, declared itself by being radically at home.'^[50] Carrying out 'textual building',^[51] by plotting dwellings, sheepfolds, tombs and monuments within different poetic forms, Wordsworth values the thriftiness with which he builds homeliness into a 'scanty plot of ground'. 'He spins and weaves the intricate octet and sestet, so difficult to finish (as he concedes in the Preface to the Duddon Sonnets), requiring such industry and discipline, yet so consoling. He spins and weaves like a saving cottager, like Isabel in "The Evening Star", glad to be living a thrifty life.'^[52] By contrast, workers, poets and family are crowded and cramped within the sixteen lines of 'A "scanty plot of ground"':

Those who look for me will have to search quite hard
 to find my slab behind the family dead,
 butcher, publican, and baker, and now bard
 adding poetry to their beef, beer, and bread.

But with Wordsworth facing opposite
and Byron three graves on I'll not go short
of the company of peers of a sort.
We might all be thrown together if the pit
whose galleries once ran beneath this plot,
causes the distinguished dead to drop
into the rabblement of bone and rot,
shored slack, crushed shale, smashed prop.

Wordsworth built church organs, Byron tanned
luggage cowhide in the age of steam.
They knew their place of rest before the land
caves in on the lowest worked-out seam.^[53]

'A "scanty plot of ground"', published in 1984, precedes the first edition of *V.*, published in 1985, and is the freshest record of Harrison's response to a landscape of industrial mining. It is a record in all probability stimulated by the news of striking miners which dominated the headlines throughout 1984. Thus, it may be argued that the material which we re-read in *V.* has had the benefit of hindsight; interestingly enough Harrison changes very little. 'A "scanty plot of ground"' and *V.* are filled with memories of outdated work and the endeavour of people not normally fêted by poetry. Instead of homeliness, the cross section of the plot of ground Harrison provides for us records the decay and loss of the workplaces of the nineteenth century. The fact that church organ building and tanning industries have found a 'place of rest *before the land / caves in on the lowest worked-out seam*' [my italics] suggests that mining is one of the last of the nineteenth century industries to decay. The sonnet is a space of ground which helps to give temporary structure to the unsafe dwelling the dead have found. Instead of a sense of consolation Harrison has built a sense of imminent disaster into his structure: the poet's family dead who lie precariously balanced above the worked-out pit. Reading *V.* we notice that the loss of craftsmanship and the decay of the mining industry is not something Harrison chooses to report as a historian, despite the nineteenth-century context he refers to. Instead he considers the imminent collapse of industrial remains in terms of the significance this has for his family dead who are resting precariously above the 'worked-out seam'.

The poet's decision to approach an understanding of social unrest via a convergence of personal and historical forces emphasises his own 'affection and upset for a Northern Britain made bleak both physically and spiritually by political policy'.^[54] The time when Harrison wrote *V.* (1984) was the time of a bitter miner's strike, in which the police representing government were seen ranged against groups of miners protesting about closure and enforced redundancy in the coalfields. (Graham Sykes' photographs which accom-

pany the text record this antagonism paralleling the awareness of contemporary industrial decay in *V.*) The vocabulary of the mining industry which Harrison uses suggests that decay and industrial collapse are painful; the phrases ‘crushed shale, smashed prop’ reminding us of terrible mining disasters where limbs and lives are smashed and crushed. In an interview with Kjartan Fløgstad, Harrison argues that ‘the pain of politics, a notion of class, reconciles us with death’.^[55] Standing within the family plot of ground Harrison makes ‘Man’ the ground on which is inscribed historical, autobiographical and metaphysical experience:

class v. class as bitter as before,
the unending violence of US and THEM,
personified in 1984
by Coal Board MacGregor and the NUM,

Hindu/Sikh, soul/body, heart v. mind,
East/West, male/female, and the ground
these fixtures are fought out on 's Man, resigned
to hope from his future what his past never found.

(V, p. 11)

Standing in Beeston Graveyard the poet is a living alternative to the stone epitaphs. The need to read the silent social implications of memories found on epitaphs is clear when we see how the poet sums up the lives of bankers, mayors and soldiers:

The language of this graveyard ranges from
a bit of Latin for a former Mayor
or those who laid their lives down at the Somme,
the hymnal fragments and the gilded prayer,

how people ‘fell asleep in the Good Lord’,
brief chisellable bits from the good book
and rhymes whatever length they could afford,
to CUNT, PISS, SHIT and (mostly) FUCK!

(V, p. 10)

Brevity is in order because it is cheap and not, as Wordsworth wanted to believe, because it was the most poignant way of expressing grief. The rhymes of the epitaphs are dependent on how much the deceased earned. The rhyme of ‘Lord’ with ‘afford’ implies the true Lord is one of wealth. In this part of the graveyard epitaphs record mankind’s obsession with social position; the banker, for example, looks after his own in quite regal style:

Far sighted for his family's future dead,
 but for his wife, this banker's still alone
 on his long obelisk, and doomed to head
 a blackened dynasty of unclaimed stone.

(V, p. 9)

The word 'obelisk' is a deflating one. As well as a monument an 'obelisk' can be a mark in a manuscript pointing to a corrupt or spurious word. The word colours our assessment of the banker's grave, making us feel his vanity is yet another cause for pain and the poet's 'social grief'. (In 'Summoned by Bells' Harrison wryly recalls being burgled because he was 'obsessively rhyming social grief'.^[56])

It is because Harrison feels the inadequacy of memories inscribed in stone that he takes it upon himself to reconquer the ground lost by the genre (epitaph) and to carry the tradition onward to unprecedented use. The poet's name 'HARRISON' becomes associated with several different areas of experience, and each time it appears it can be read as a potential epitaph. Like Thomas Gray in 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' Harrison imagines the death of a poet (himself) and modulates his poem to create his own epitaph. Peter Sacks has traced Gray's construction of the individual death, a model which is invaluable for our investigative reading of V.:

This individual death, albeit imaginary, is that of the poet himself. The preliminary description and meditation in the graveyard, is, in part, a presentation of the sensibility of that poet and a definition of the terms by which he should be mourned. It is carefully modulated so as to climax with a plea on behalf of any dying person's desire for remembrance. And this is accordingly followed by a projection of the poet's death ... together with a presentation of the epitaph written by the poet himself.^[57]

Accepting the idea that Gray's elegy presents the sensibility of a poet and defines 'the terms by which he should be mourned' before the final epitaph is inscribed makes for an illuminating reading of the series of epitaphic moments we read in V.. In the analysis which follows I assume that V. is shaped by Harrison's consideration of several of the functions which have been ascribed to epitaph by various poets. In the first instance the poet considers the importance of paying tribute to the memory of a writer. In the opening stanzas of V. Harrison imagines the space his own death will be given in the graveyard:

Next millennium you'll have to search quite hard
 to find my slab behind the family dead,
 butcher, publican, and baker, now me, bard
 adding poetry to their beef, beer and bread.

(V, p. 7)

The opening line is carefully modulated so as to emphasise the poet's dependency on the reader's willingness to search him out and read his epitaph, 'Next millennium *you'll* have to search quite hard' [my italics]. It is not until the final stanzas of the poem that the reader is allowed to read the words 'poetry', 'beef, beer and bread' from an epitaph. Initially we depend on the poet to tell us who is buried in the graveyard. Harrison can be described as 'the writer assuming the role of the dead man in the game of writing'^[58] and this coupled with the list cataloguing the type of person buried (including himself 'poet') in Beeston means that his text has interesting parallels with a debate between literary theorists on 'the consequences of their discovery of the disappearance or death – of the author'.^[59]

According to Foucault writing 'which once had the duty of providing immortality, now possesses the right to kill, be its author's murderer'.^[60] The essay responsible for starting a debate which casts doubt on the value of any attempt to recreate the author's 'person' in a text was Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author'. In this essay Barthes claims that linguistic interpretations prove how unnecessary a 'person' is to a text:

Linguistics has provided the destruction of the Author with a valuable analytical tool by showing that the whole of the enunciation is an empty process, functioning perfectly without there being any need for it to be filled with the person of the interlocutors.^[61]

One serious consequence of removing the person of the interlocutor from an enunciation is that the author is not seen to empathise in particular with any of the characters he invokes. The voice we listen to in *V.* is full of empathy. By empathy I mean that throughout Harrison's poetry his 'I' is characterised by a propensity to remember and identify with individuals and groups of people who shared his social background or have suffered from class discrimination. Beginning with a blank 'slab' precariously poised above a worked-out pit *V.* becomes symbolic of Harrison's search for a poem which can fulfill his desire to 'speak publicly as a poet' and also serve as his own epitaph. Another poet who is more interested in building an epitaph which will remind people of his efforts to uncover injustice than writing to guarantee himself restful immortality is Milton. The quasi-Miltonic combination of the public and privately tender was observed by Michael Davie in Harrison's work:

Milton could go in a moment from the public and political to the privately tender. That was one of the things that he, Harrison, tried to do in his work.^[62]

Prompted to write *Lycidas* by the death of Edward King, Milton finds pastoral an expressive outlet for the death of a fellow poet and a friend:

So may some gentle Muse
 With lucky words favour my destined urn,
 And as he passes turn,
 And bid fair peace be to my sabled shroud.
 For we were nursed on the self same hill,
 Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade and rill.^[63]

In making his memory of King a distinctive subject in a pastoral setting Milton entertains the idea of a new world in which a dead poet is transformed into a 'Muse'. The 'Muse' Milton refers to here is most probably King's, since the Muse is made masculine ('as he passes') and all the classical Muses are feminine. Such transformation implies the immortality of poetic inspiration even if the muse may choose not to 'bid fair peace' to every poet's tomb. The 'destined urn' Milton imagines for himself is a stately and solemn building which is a result of the pastoral nurturing which Milton shared with King. The syntax of the line '*for ... / we fed the same flocks*' [my italics] is complicated but worth comment, since it suggests that the pastoral companionship of poets should be lavishly commemorated. Later in the poem the painfulness of bad shepherding is apparent when St. Peter laments the loss of King to the 'fold' (priesthood). In denouncing false teachers St. Peter's pastoral imagery has dual reference to poets and priests:

Their lean and flashy songs
 Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw,
 The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
 But swoll'n with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
 Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread.^[64]

The magnificent monument Milton builds for himself in imagination is an achievement in a world where 'lean and flashy songs' seem more widely accepted. His elaboration would seem hollow did it not so honestly betray the elusiveness of the enduring fame and memory the urn tries to capture. The word 'lucky' draws directly on Milton's desire for, and fear of not finding, a place of rest in which his awareness of public injustice brings him recognition together with his empathy for the poet Edward King. Tony Harrison's attempt to imagine his own 'destined urn' leads him to imagine his name in lights amongst commercial billboards:

Some, where kids use aerosols, use giant signs
 to let the people know who's forged their fetters
 like PRI CE O WALES above West Yorkshire mines
 (no prizes for who nicked the missing letters!).

The big blue star for booze, tobacco ads,
the magnet's monogram, the royal crest,
insignia in neon dwarfs the lads
who spray a few odd FUCKS when they're depressed.

Letters of transparent tubes and gas
in Dusseldorf are blue and flash out KRUPP.
Arms are hoisted for the British ruling class
and clandestine, genteel aggro keeps them up.

And there's HARRISON on some Leeds building sites
I've taken in fun as blazoning my name,
which I've also seen on books, in Broadway lights,
so why can't skins with spraycans do the same?

(V, pp. 15–16)

Harrison is explaining (and implicitly justifying) the skin's spraying, trying to understand what motivates mankind to wish for public recognition. In the epitaph which ends Gray's 'Elegy in A Country Churchyard' divine power preserves a silence around the poet's name: 'No farther seek his merits to disclose, / Or draw his frailties from their dread abode . . . / The bosom of his Father and his God.'^[65] Viewed from this perspective the neon signs mimic epitaphs, the silence emanating from the names emblazoned in light being 'clandestine' and preserving the memory of class structures, mimicking the incentive of religious peace evident in Gray's Epitaph. By referring to billboards as if they are epitaphs the poet commemorates 'clandestine' aggression. Many of the neon signs record manifestations of aggression; 'KRUPP' is a German arms manufacturer, the letters 'NF' stolen from 'PRI CE O WALES' suggest *in absentia* an active National Front. Yet after all these signs of 'aggro' Harrison finds 'fun' in seeing his name 'on some Leeds building site' even though it has been displayed more publicly and impressively in Broadway lights. His question 'so why can't skins with spraycans do the same?' indicates the deep-rootedness of the aggression rather than 'fun' motivating the skins to spray. Wordsworth argued that epitaphs could be responsible for educating a nation. 'As soon as nations had learned the use of letters, epitaphs were inscribed upon these monuments; in order that their intention might be more surely and adequately fulfilled.'^[66] For Wordsworth the function of the epitaph writer is clearly to soothe and console rather than to shock or censure. The display of neon lighting which commemorates his name shows Tony Harrison temporarily concurring with the idea that the function of epitaph is to uphold national stability. However Harrison's quite open poetic manipulation of rhymes communicates unease ('feters'/'letters', 'crest'/'depressed'), and implies that the aggression motivating the building

of giant neon signs is based on a manipulation of memory and consciousness. The poet's fame emblazoned in lights is paralleled by the skinhead's works. 'Ah've got mi work on show all ovver Leeds / like this UNITED 'ere on some sod's stone.' Challenged to sign his authorship the poet reads his own name:

He took the can, contemptuous, unhurried
and cleared the nozzle and prepared to sign
the UNITED sprayed where mam and dad were buried.
He aerosolled his name. And it was mine.

(V, p. 22)

Harrison is bitterly angry at the desecration of gravestones, and yet he finds authorship and fame merging with the skin, a fact which emphasises that no poet can declare himself clear of (or superior to) the public diseases he exposes.

Immortality literally means enduring fame or remembrance and poets prompted to write elegy by personal memories of the dead can turn those memories into assessments of the public durability of their own writing after death. In addition, by examining the epitaphs and monuments which poets imagine for themselves (often within an elegy) we see poets assessing the ways in which they may be remembered. According to Wordsworth the existence of epitaphs depends on a consciousness of immortality which includes religious awareness:

Without the consciousness of a principle of immortality in the human soul, Man could never have had awakened in him the desire to live in the remembrance of his fellows; mere love, or the yearning of kind towards kind, could not have produced it.^[67]

It is important to emphasise how radically Harrison challenges the religious promise of immortality preserved by epitaph since in a recent *Symposium* (1979) on the 'Poetics of Memory' Joseph Weber celebrated the continuation into the twentieth century of the poetic inspiration memory offers and the Wordsworthian equation of memory with immortality:

Memory is movement, movement through the dialectic of life and experience. It is an elaborate system of immortality. . . . Memory is that divine impulse, a ladder of the imagination, in which 'poets find their base by ascending'.^[68]

V. is a poem which refuses to accept unquestioningly that there is 'a principle of immortality in the human soul' (be it poet, skinhead or parent) when so many are forgotten within the bounds of a 'plot' of a graveyard. Reading V. we can see that one part of Harrison's social consciousness is haunted by memories of his mother and father's religious statements of belief:

This pen's all I have of magic wand.
I know this world's so torn but want no other
except for dad who'd hoped from 'the beyond'
a better life than this one, *with* my mother.

Though I don't believe in afterlife at all
and know it's cheating it's hard *not* to make
a sort of furtive prayer from this skin's scrawl,
his UNITED mean 'in Heaven' for their sake,

an accident of meaning to redeem
an act intended as mere desecration
and make the thoughtless spraying of his team
apply to higher things, and to the nation.

(V, p. 15)

The comparison between Wordsworth's faith in a religious immortality and Harrison's agnosticism reveals that there is a new area of experience 'which formerly religion tried to concern itself with'^[69] which Harrison would like to fill. Remembering his father's hope in a heavenly unknown Harrison tries to forget that 'the world's so torn', and even tries reading 'higher things' into the skinhead's desecrating scrawl:

I wish on this skin's word deep aspirations,
first the prayer for my parents I can't make,
then a call to Britain and to all the nations
made in the name of love for peace's sake.

(V, p. 17)

Here we see the poet at work with the word 'aspirations'. His use of the word indicates an awareness of the religious tendencies in Wordsworthian elegy and is a clear move to catch the attention of the cultured reader as the skin contemptuously recognises: '*Aspirations, cunt!*' (V, p. 17). Harrison wishes 'deep aspirations' onto the skin's word. 'Deep' fills the stanza with a sense of deeply felt wishing. In 'Elegiac Stanzas' Wordsworth experiences grief at the death of his brother. Death makes him consider immortality, and wish for an afterlife. His heavy grief roots him to earthliness while he yearns to imagine the immortal and the beyond, and he writes 'a deep distress hath humanized my Soul'.^[70] By putting together a word connoting depth with one connoting height ('deep aspirations') Harrison is also creating a tension. In Wordsworth's case the tension between the word 'deep' and the implied desire that the soul wishes to aspire above its 'humanized' state, emphasises the fact that the poet's profound grief obscures a divine source of comfort. Harrison implies that respecting religious 'aspirations' may be an outdated part of the poet's work;

'O.K. forget the aspirations' (V, p. 18).

The word 'aspiration' does not just have religious connotations. Harrison incenses the skinhead because the word reminds the latter of his powerlessness to aspire to a job:

*Aspirations, cunt! Folk on t'fucking dole
'ave got about as much scope to aspire
above the shit they're dumped in, cunt, as coal
aspires to be chucked on t'fucking fire.*

(V, p. 17)

The skinhead makes no bones about the fact that he cannot see the point of having 'aspirations' since they are not real. Aspirations for jobs or better lives such as those held by mothers for their sons (the skinhead cuts himself off from his own mother fearing what she might think of his jobless life: '*If mi mam's up there, don't want to meet 'er /listening to me list my dirty deeds*' (V, p. 18)) will disappear into nothing as quickly as coal burns on a fire. The skin's contempt (expressed by his swearing) tells us that he finds the poet's working use of 'aspirations' condescending and irrelevant. Indeed, the moment that the skin throws contempt on the word 'aspirations' he is more than a mocker of tradition, he declares himself inimical to memory. In a Radio 3 broadcast Harrison declared that 'memory you must remember was described by the ancient poet Hesiod as "the Mother of the Muses" – upon that depends the aspirations, the sufferings of the distant past'.^[71] We witness the consequences of the skin's expression of contempt for 'aspirations' in the second attempt to devise an epitaph for the poet.

The skin tries to carve an epitaph for Harrison which will consign him to oblivion along with the unemployed:

*... When dole-wallahs fuck off to the void
what'll t'mason carve up for their jobs?
The cunts who lieth 'ere wor unemployed?*

*This lot worked at one job all life through.
Byron, 'Tanner', 'Lieth 'ere interred.'
They'll chisel fucking poet when they do you
and that, yer cunt, 's a crude four-letter word.*

(V, pp. 18–19)

For the first time we are told what has been chiselled onto the stones commemorating workers like Byron and Wordsworth. The epitaph the skin creates for Harrison does not allow him a working life as a poet. The autobiographical moments with which the

skin wishes to preserve the poet's memory are moments of family censure. His rhymes inscribe a soulless, jobless epitaph. Calling Harrison a '*cunt*' means that the poet joins the unemployed '*cunts who lieth here*' (something that his family long suspected: 'all my years of Latin and of Greek / They'd never seen the point of "for a job".' (HSP, p. 164)). The skin's rhymes aim to represent Harrison as a soulmate of those consigned to oblivion. He rhymes '*void*'/'*unemployed*', and more seriously from the point of view of poetry, '*interred*'/'*word*'. With the word '*interred*' the skin half buries memory in stone. The moment that the skinhead imagines Harrison's epitaph and rhymes memory into oblivion recalls the sonnet 'Blocks'. In this poem Harrison is commemorating the rhymes he learned at his mother's knee:

A droning vicar bores the congregation
and misquotes *Ecclesiastes* Chapter 3.
If any one should deliver an oration
it should be me, her son, in poetry.

All the family round me start to sob.
For all my years of Latin and of Greek
they'd never seen the point of 'for a job',
I'm not prepared to stand up now and speak.

A time to . . . plough back into the soil
the simple rhymes that started at her knee,
the poetry, that 'sedentary toil'
that began, when her lap was warm, with ABC.

(HSP, p. 164)

Considering the origins and suitability of rhymes is the poem's main subject. The poet mourns his mother by remembering the deep influence she has had over his poetic personality. He learnt the loving rhythms of her life in her 'warm lap'. By referring to *Ecclesiastes* and almost quoting a line from the Bible, Harrison pays respect to her religious hopes and the personal rhythms of her life which seem to be biblically influenced. The 'simple rhymes' he associates with her life are warm and fertile (the image of ploughing them back into a poem implies this fertility as well as workmanship). The rhymes throughout the sonnet, however, express something more than absorbed lovingness; they communicate great pain. On one level much of the pain of this grief is conveyed in tearful terms: 'All the family round me start to sob', 'I hear the family cry'. The 'simple rhyme' that Harrison chooses to make between the verb 'sob' and noun 'job' focuses on the sense Harrison has that he has let everyone down by being speechless at the funeral, as well as on the pain he caused his family by insisting on becoming a poet.

The literary quotation 'sedentary toil' is a subtle move to justify Harrison's position, and make peace with his mother who did not understand his poetry. The phrase 'sedentary toil' bears close resemblance to Yeats' line 'this sedentary trade',^[72] a description of poetry which occurs in Yeats' poem 'The Tower'. The misquotation may be purely for the convenience of rhyme, but it is in itself an interesting example of a poet writing from memory of his reading. Since Yeats frequently refers to poetry as 'toil' ('nothing but comes readier to the hand / Than this accustomed toil'^[73]) it is not surprising that Harrison's memory has substituted 'toil' for 'trade'. A closer look at Yeats' poem 'The Tower' helps to explain why Harrison chooses to make a literary gesture at the moment he pays tribute to his mother. 'The Tower' makes reference to the literary works of Homer and the Latin classicists Plotinus and Plato. Interestingly, he feels a need to prepare his peace with 'learned Italian things':

I have prepared my peace
With learned Italian things
And the proud stones of Greece,
Poet's imaginings
And memories of love,
Memories of the words of women,
All those things whereof
Man makes a superhuman
Mirror-resembling dream.^[74]

The poetic strategy which emerges here is one couched in visionary terms. The poet is very aware of intellectual endeavour ('learned'), heroic gesture ('proud stone') and the powerful words of women, yet the poetry he chooses to write he regards as 'sedentary trade'. The etymology of the word 'sedentary' suggests the homeliness of his subject; that of the word 'trade' suggests that he intends to live by it. 'This sedentary trade' is not motivated by heroic endeavour or the desire to be one of those model 'upstanding men' of whom mothers might be proud:

I leave both faith and pride
To young upstanding men
Climbing the mountain-side,
That under bursting dawn
They may drop a fly;
Being of that metal made
Till it was broken by
This sedentary trade.^[75]

The image of the 'upstanding men' climbing a mountain side in order to 'drop a fly' pours

scorn on their endeavour. Their heroic efforts will count for little. However, the poet also admires the effort exerted for such a small gesture, which had 'metal' in it. The claim that 'this sedentary trade' broke the metal of that gesture suggests that such a trade delights in ridiculing heroic values as well as replacing them with sterner 'metal'. To make such detailed recourse to Yeats whilst appreciating Harrison's sonnet of remembrance to his mother may seem a strange method of reading. However, the need Harrison has to make poetry his 'job' and his decision to attack (often using crude and violent language) an established literary scene, indicates that he is a poet who feels a need to prepare his peace with memories of his past.

Despite the powerful ramifications of peace which the reference to Yeats contains, literature distances Harrison from his mother and words refuse to help him to remember her. The movement in 'Blocks' is towards the ossification of memory (Harrison seems to lack the words to prevent this). It will require great effort to 'move the blocks to say farewell', to reach beyond death:

Blocks with letters. Lettered block of stone.
I have to move the blocks to say farewell.
I hear the family cry, the vicar drone
and VALE, MATER's all that I can spell.

(HSP, p. 164)

Throughout *V.* memories of his mother are integral to Harrison's creativity. She haunts him: 'Though not given much to fears of spooky scaring / I don't fancy an encounter with mi mam / playing Hamlet with me for this swearing' (*V.*, p. 23). In both 'Blocks' and *V.* stone epitaphs are associated with the decay of memory and its speechlessness, inscribed stone is not the medium Harrison feels most comfortable with when preparing his own epitaph. Even when the skin first appears in Harrison's consciousness the mother tongue is referred to:

What is it that these crude words are revealing?
What is it that this aggro act implies?
Giving the dead their xenophobic feeling
or just a *cri-de-coeur* because man dies?

*So what's a cri-de-coeur, cunt? Can't you speak
the language that yer mam spoke. Think of 'er!
Can you only get yer tongue round fucking Greek?
Go and fuck yerself with cri-de-coeur!*

'She didn't talk like you do for a start!
 I shouted, turning where I thought the voice had been.
She didn't understand yer fucking 'art'!
She thought yer fucking poetry obscene!

(V, p. 17)

The intensity with which Harrison re-awakens memories of his mother tongue, and the French and Greek roots of his poetic style deeply seated in his consciousness, are highly dramatic. In an interview with John Haffenden Harrison expresses the importance he affords to the mother tongue. He uses language with the confidence that it embraces all cultures, high and low, and all people from all classes. He wants to write poetry which allows him to man a ladder with access to the origins of his poetic personality:

Traditionally when you climb a ladder you are expected to kick the rungs away, but I think that's impossible with language: you are always conscious of how your mother spoke. The most formative linguistic part of your life is the mother tongue, the early speech.^[76]

The Trackers of Oxyrhincus stages a moment of intense concentration which produces a deeper consciousness of the origins we hold in our consciousness. The moment when Grenfell becomes Apollo is a superb moment of theatre which draws into the open self-destructive forces. Apollo is terrifying, as he tyrannically drives Grenfell to do his will. Grenfell's love of searching for lost fragments of plays turns into a destructive nightmare:

Apollo

. . .] σ [. . .] κιο [.] πειτα [. . .] πεσσυθ [. . .] γ [. . .] λ
 [.] ω [. . .

What goes in the gaps, Grenfell? Come on, you know.

Grenfell

I don't! I don't. Go! Go! Go!

Apollo

απαντα χρηστα και something . . . λειν

You've got to use that mercurial brain

and put all the missing letters in,

from this instant I'm in you and using your skin.

Find me the play where these fragments go

. . .] σ [. . .] κιο [.] πειτα [. . .] πεσσυθ [. . .] γ [. . .] λ
 [.] ω [. . . etc. etc.^[77]

Apollo's manipulation of Grenfell's consciousness and his mania to search out meaning 'frees from oblivion the Ichneutes of Sophocles'. The moment of intensity alerts the au-

dience to the deeply buried fragments of the past which can be recalled to mind. In *V.* a similar moment of intensity alerts Harrison to the disagreeable destructive forces there are operating against memory deep within his poetic consciousness; the period of intense concentration which produced the skin's voice in *V.* ends when Harrison finds that they share one name. This period of concentration unites several factors which feed his creativity. Keats regarded such intensity as a sign of artistic excellence. In a letter of December 1817 to George and Thomas Keats he wrote:

The excellence of every art is in its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close proximity with Beauty and Truth.^[78]

It is an intense moment when the disagreeable skin aerosols Harrison's name 'among the dead'. The song '*Here Comes the Bride*' is bawled by the boy footballers indicating the chaotic state of mind which the skinhead's action perpetrates (viewing kid footballers earlier in *V.* Harrison saw their attempts to make the blossom fall as a 'game'):

The boy footballers bawl *Here Comes the Bride*
and drifting blossoms fall onto my head.
One half of me's alive but one half died
when the skin half sprayed my name among the dead.

Half versus half, the enemies within
the heart that can't be whole till they unite.
As I stoop to grab the crushed HARP lager tin
the day's already dusk, half dark, half light.

(*V.*, p. 23)

Although pleasant and familiar moments seem distorted, their presence helps to overcome the disagreeability of the skinhead who shares Harrison's name. This is partly due to the fact that the song '*Here Comes the Bride*' is associated with a ritual celebrating procreation rather than demise.

Harrison's unwritten name is as epitaphic as the written examples which fill the graveyard. This time the plot of ground the poet is standing on where his name is made into epitaph, seems to be emblematic of his head, heart, spirit. Such a working use of memory becomes much clearer after a reading of 'The Mother of the Muses'. In 'The Mother of the Muses' the poet is driven by anxiety to prove that his 'memory's not ossified / and the way into that storehouse [is] still unlocked'.^[79] A link between memory, death and epitaph is clearly signposted here. A word like 'ossified' hints at ossuaries, and continuing the same vein of thought 'storehouse' may reminds us of the close association between tomb and home; for example the gravedigger in *Hamlet* talks about the houses that he

builds. Making his own mind the place where memory is stored and maybe ossified, the poet becomes a living thinking monument to his father-in-law whose death stimulated the poet into writing this elegy. Harrison is under no illusions about the transience of memories or the devastating numbness which follows the upending of a lifetime's belief in immortality:

Some hoard memories as some hoard gold
against that rapidly approaching day
that's all they have to live on, being old,
but find their saving's spirited away.
What's the point of having lived at all
in the much-snapped duplex in Etobicoke
if it gets snapped away beyond recall,
in spite of all the snapshots, at one stroke?^[80]

At this point in 'The Mother of the Muses' the length of 'storehouse' memory's existence clearly depends on man's ability to physically sustain his existence and sanity. We may find this blatant rejection of memory's endurance disturbing; however by the end of 'The Mother of the Muses' memory no longer pertains to a 'storehouse' but to the oil of a lamp:

In that silent dark I swore I'd make it known,
while the oil of memory feeds the wick of life
and the flame from it's still constant and still bright,
that come oblivion or not, I loved my wife
in that long thing where we lay with day like night.

The poet celebrates the limited time he has to make his love for his wife known despite the fact that oil, wick and flame will all run out. Harrison bravely declares a belief that 'mere love' is strong enough to motivate him to write elegy; 'that long thing' where we lay is more like a coffin than a house and yet the loving memory inside it is 'constant' and 'bright'.

Life and loving relationships are hallowed by the graveyard at the end of *V.* Love is enduring, a belief strengthened by the fact that at the moment of leaving the poet's consciousness it is love which is absent from the skinhead's memory. Harrison draws on the vocabulary of *The Oresteia* to create an image which copes with his own problematical relationship with his past:

The ones we choose to love become our anchor
when the hawser of the blood-tie's hacked, or frays.
But a voice that scorns chorales is yelling: *Wanker!*
It's the aerosolling skin I met today's.

(V, 31)

The word 'blood-tie' is frequently repeated in *The Agamemnon* to refer to family blood ties. Not only do these include relationships between parents and children but they also involve the inheritance of blood-grudge (the duty of revenge). Harrison's parents are not his only 'blood-ties'; the moment when Harrison finds that the skinhead has the same name as himself suggests that he is related to the poet. These two kinships explain the poet's choice of verbs, 'hacked', 'frays'. 'Hacked' is violent and vengeful, more appropriate to the poet's links with the skinhead and his revengeful attitudes to remembrance. 'Frays' implies that memory (for example of parents) fades away. Equipped with the insight disagreeable intensity gives him, the last section of the poem shows him making his way hurriedly through the changing landscape of his childhood to join his 'woman' in 'bed', which can also be a concept associated with warring. The Trojans fought for the 'bedbond' between Helen of Troy and Paris: 'They paid the blood-price, the bridegroom's bloodkin / chanting the bride-hymn, hymning the bedbond.'^[81] The poet is always conscious of the potential for friction 'where opposites seem *sometimes* unified' [my italics]:

The bus to the station's still the No. 1
but goes by routes that I don't recognise.
I look out for known landmarks as the sun
reddens the swabs of clouds in darkening skies.

Home, home, home, to my woman as the red
darkens from a fresh blood to a dried.
Home, home to my woman, home to bed
where opposites seem sometimes unified.

(V, p. 26)

The anger that stimulated Harrison to write the poem subsides and changes like the angry sky from a revengeful nature (revenge against the skin's desecration, the injustice of the past) to a conciliatory one. The distinction between the skin's vengeful and desecrating attitude to memory and the evident security Harrison feels in the loving domestic memory of his woman (a feeling communicated by words associated with hearths, ordinary labour such as shipping) shows us that Harrison does not see himself as primarily a judging or revengeful poet. Loving memory which associates itself with a desire to be beyond itself

triumphs in the poem. At the end Harrison can say:

If love of art, or love, gives you affront
that the grave I'm in's graffitied then, maybe,
erase the more offensive FUCK and CUNT
but leave, with the worn UNITED, one small v.

(V, p32)

The vindictiveness of the poet who complains in *The School of Eloquence* that 'the dumb go down in history and disappear / and not one gentleman 's been brought to book' (HSP, p. 121) is exchanged for a plea to the reader to recognise art (the poet's) and the presence of love. However, few elegies have recorded such a devastating attack on historical, traditional and poetic forces as is evident in V. although Milton 'mounts a swingeing and menacingly prophetic attack'^[82] on clergy in *Lycidas*, and since the skinhead is so carefully absorbed into the poet's consciousness it is not surprising that critics do not separate the concept of revenge and vandalism from Harrison's approach to the remains of the deceased. (The presence of 'one small v.' implies that the poet does not want the aggressive aspect of his art forgotten.)

Jeremy Hooker has pointed out that Harrison's attitude to tradition can be read as that of a vandal by comparison with the approach of T. S. Eliot:

There has never been a period more conscious of the presence of history in words than the present, and while the consciousness owes something to T. S. Eliot, it can be developed and used for different ends. Thus, it is possessed by a poet like David Jones or (in the context of Ireland) Seamus Heaney, who wishes to remember and conserve the past, and by a poet like Tony Harrison, who would like to see 'the looms of owned language smashed apart'.^[83]

And yet V. is not a vandal's desecration of literary (particularly the epitaphic and elegiac) and religious tradition, but a genuine attempt to face up to the demystification of tradition which Harrison suggests has taken place and affects him. When we study the epitaph Harrison considers for himself we find the past present in words which echo literary tradition but also in words which have no literary tradition. The past evident in Harrison's epitaph is present for him in speech, in words which were shaped by historical experience and which sound the histories of his family and forefathers:

*Beneath your feet's a poet, then a pit.
Poetry supporter, if you're here to find
how poems can grow from (beat you to it!) SHIT
find the beef, the beer, the bread, then look behind.*

(V, p. 33)

Harrison's typography expresses memory as if it comes from people's tongues. In an interview with John Haffenden he explained the significance that he designates to italic writing in *Continuous*:

The italic, [which] is my father's speech or the extracts such as Tidd the Cato Street conspirator's last words before he was hung. It seemed as if the italic could somehow take over from the roman – I mean a pun on roman, since what I designate in roman type is me as the poet – so that in the end I could become a mouthpiece. In the end, that is to say, there could be poems which are all italic.^[84]

In the poet's epitaph the italic rejuvenates the past of silenced workers by making the poet their 'mouthpiece' from the dead. Imitating a famous elegy (Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' ends with an epitaph) and at the same time attempting to speak in the language of ordinary men, Harrison implies that the experience of meditating upon 'the beef, the beer, the bread' can give us astute poetic and social consciousness. Having drawn attention to the normal patterns of daily life which serve as a point of departure for his creative effort Harrison encourages the reader to probe deeper and re-read his poem, 'look behind!'. By doing so, Harrison risks violating the traditional silence which preserves the judgement of a humble man's frailties and merits for the merciful 'bosom of his father and his God':

No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode
(There they alike in trembling hope repose)
The bosom of his Father and his God.^[85]

This final stanza of Gray's epitaph meekly and sincerely suggests that the real memory of a man of humble birth is divinely preserved even if not readily evident to the passing reader. Indeed Wordsworth also associates the language of the churchyard with a 'humble expression of Christian confidence in immortality', and adds that it is cause for admiration that 'the afflictions which peasants and rural artisans have to struggle with are for the most part secret'^[86] since the silence reflects their humility. Harrison is not content with leaving memory to divine sources, or 'chisellable bits from the good book' (V, p. 10).

The inclusion of the word 'SHIT' on his epitaph plays out a joke at T. S. Eliot's expense when it equates death and 'SHIT'. In 'Little Gidding' Eliot posited 'every poem an epitaph',^[87] and in 'East Coker' Eliot's epitaphic poetry makes use of the biblical rhythm found in *Ecclesiastes* 3 to direct the timing of the lines (offering an interesting link with the subject matter of Harrison's poem 'Blocks' (HSP, p. 164)). Arguably, Eliot's reference to 'Dung and death' is mimicked by Harrison in his final epitaph:

Keeping time,
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing
As in their living in the living seasons
The time of the seasons and the constellations
The time of milking and the time of harvest
The time of the coupling of man and woman
And that of beasts. Feet rising and falling.
Eating and drinking. Dung and death.

Dawn points, and another day
Prepares for heat and silence.^[88]

Eliot's use of *Ecclesiastes* 3 to imitate rhythms found in ordinary life bears a significant relation to Tony Harrison's use of the same biblical passage to consider the impact his working class background has had on rhymes in his poetry. The 'time' Eliot responds to is suspended in the movement of sixteenth century dance:

The dance seen in its agrarian context, its particular time and place, can only result in an apprehension of life's transitoriness; but with the extension of the dance into the continuous dance of the seasons, this apprehension is transformed into an affirmation of the principle of regeneration. An apprehension of death makes way for the recognition of the principle of life; nevertheless, death's finality remains as part of the recognition.^[89]

However, the fact that the rhythm of the dance is halted by the word 'death' and the reminder that the dead nourish the corn (death is the grim reaper) imply that, although Eliot's verse seems to take its rhythm from the action of daily work, death calls the tune. In 'Blocks' rhythm and rhyme are associated in Harrison's consciousness with the death of his mother. Death makes way for the continuation of life and poetry, activities which easily outweigh death in the poet's consciousness. Eliot's writing can be read as a stark assessment of life. Consciousness of death keeps the rhythm slow and sedate. In contrast, Tony Harrison's awareness of death embraces wit and scatological humour. By using the word 'SHIT' on his epitaph he carries out a cheerful game with the reader, anticipating his own 'simple rhymes' (HSP, p.164). Harrison is motivated by his desire to write as comedian and tragedian, rather than by the desire to vandalise religious and literary traditions. (The latter misinterpretation of his motivation can be partly explained by his attempt to introduce wit at the expense of literary and religious traditions into his epitaph; a wit which can be seen as rather indecent mockery.)

It is important to establish that Harrison re-examines the function of epitaph to face up to several traditions positively (that is by offering alternatives), since any attempt to argue for a single function of the memory associated with the epitaphs of V. does not do justice to the scope of experience Harrison's writing aims to cover and make sense of.

It is useful to keep in mind the ambitiousness of the historical spectrum that Harrison embraces with his poetry when considering the memories that we see put into writing in *V.* In an interview with John Haffenden, Tony Harrison commented on his simultaneous awareness of the historical, autobiographical and metaphysical in poetry:

I see them all as intimately related: the historical, the autobiographical, and the metaphysical if you like. To go back to the beginning, I gave *The Loiners* the title of the citizens of Leeds, and obviously that title is obscure for people who don't know who Loiners are. I always remember the way kids at school used to write out their addresses in full starting with their name and school and going on with 'Beeston, Leeds, West Riding, Yorkshire, England, Great Britain, Europe, The World, The Universe'. I think I have a mind and sensibility which keeps running up and down that kind of ladder, that scale or spectrum, and it seems to me that what you call the psychological issues are as historical as the historical issues are psychological. I see them as part of the same scale, the same historical spectrum.^[90]

What we see in *V.* is a poet interested in creating epitaphs which can inform his political, literary, autobiographical, social and religious thought. The poet standing on a 'spot' of ground exercises his mind and feeling on a large 'scale'. The words 'spot', 'plot' and 'ground' reverberate throughout *V.* The links between the epitaphs and the place they are found illustrate the poet's declared preoccupation with 'running up and down that kind of ladder, that scale or spectrum'. ('That' refers to a combined historical and psychological perspective.) In the process of exercising his mind and feeling Harrison makes good use of the forms and tropes associated with elegy and includes several references to other poets. However, there is a price to be paid for such cultural gratification. In an interview with John Haffenden Harrison said:

I work to give the reader of poetry maximum gratification, but he has to pay for it: that literary frisson – "*hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère*" – will cost you so much in social awareness, in the consciousness of social gaps and divisions.^[91]

It is in the exploitation of the literary experience as well as conflicting language codes that Harrison sees the opportunity to be 'political'. In the next chapter I focus on Harrison's relationship with his reader and the way in which literary allusion can create social awareness, especially in combination with Harrison's personal memories of his childhood in Leeds.

Chapter 2

‘Breaking the Silence’^[92] of Oblivion

Tony Harrison’s prefaces, interviews and critical essays tell the story of a poet who is very sensitive to the fact that his earliest childhood memories can be considered unfit for literature and an unmemorable part of his own development as a poet. His poetry reclaims these memories from the obscurity to which they would otherwise be consigned. In an interview with Richard Hoggart the poet talks of the strength which the reclamation of a life once seemingly unfit for literature gives him:

The older I become, the stronger the hold is; I think its something to do with the reclamation of a life which, as I lived it, didn’t seem the stuff that literature could be made of.^[93]

Harrison’s reclamation of his childhood spent in Leeds (which may be experience which alienates a literary audience) reflects the poet’s desire to be accessible to an audience unaccustomed to reading, ‘(I’d like to be the poet my father reads!)’ (HSP, p.114) as well as one accustomed to poetry. The variety of audiences which Harrison imagines his memories address is well summarised by the final lines of ‘A Good Read’ (HSP, p. 141):

These poems about you, dad, should make good reads
for the bus you took from Beeston into town
for people with no time like you in Leeds –

once I’m writing I can’t put you down!

(HSP, p. 141)

The ‘good reads’ in question refer to Harrison’s reclamation of childhood experience including the poet’s reading of classics like *King Lear*. In addition to addressing his dad, and the reader who has ‘no time’ for Leeds or experience of Leeds, Harrison is obviously a poet who even in talking to himself wants to be overheard, for example the pun on ‘I can’t put you down’ in the final line of the poem works in two ways. The compliment Harrison is paying to the good reading material which his father’s life creates is also a colloquial way of arguing that once in writing his father can’t be put down by the classes he spent his life working for.

In ‘A Good Read’ the relaxed way in which the poet casually refers to different people’s reading habits implies that the poet can feel at ease with what Dorothy Wordsworth identified in her brother’s poetry as ‘the generality of readers’.^[94] However, Harrison is never assured of the acquiescence of his parents in what he writes (he remembers his mother weeping ‘You weren’t brought up to write such mucky books!’ (HSP, p.166)). The

evident discrepancies between writing and reader responses complicate the idea suggested by Harrison's remark to Hoggart that personal memories can strengthen a poet's position in a literary world which prefers to consign such subject matter to oblivion and forgetfulness.

The issue of how ordinary people have been rescued from oblivion and represented throughout the history of literature is political as well as a question of literary taste. In his preface to *The Faber Book of English History in Verse* Kenneth Baker asserts that the lives of ordinary people were well represented in poetry:

Running alongside the decisive events of history, and approachable through the writings of poets, are the lives of the ordinary people of England . . . this sea of men and women flows through our history, shaping and defining our national character. E. Thomas' poem 'Lob' conveys something of the dogged cheerfulness of our people and the sense of continuity their presence lends to historical events. . . . Language is one of the potent forces which unites us as a nation.^[95]

In contrast to Baker, Harrison deliberately aims to bring about the polarisation of an audience. As an artist who has spent much time in the eastern bloc Tony Harrison is highly sensitive to political intolerance, duplicity and the existence of an audience which expects to read between the lines of any artistic piece. In 'Curtain Sonnets' Harrison uses sexual metaphor to polarise his readers into East and West, men and women, and to reflect the violent clashes and suspicions between nations.

The poem '*Guava Libre*' written in Leningrad is dedicated to the American film actress Jane Fonda, who also happened to be a prominent peace campaigner against the Vietnam war during the 1970's:

Pickled Gold Coast clitoridectomies?
Labia minora in formaldehyde?
A rose pink death mask of a screen cult kiss,
Marilyn's mouth or vulva mummified?

(HSP, p. 55)

Sexual metaphor for the guavas is blown to hyperbolic proportions (into a posterlike vulgarity) in order to polarise the poet's audience sexually. No woman would enjoy the thought of being immortalised by such images. The metaphoric surface barely keeps in check a sense of outrage against human intolerance and macho insensitivity. The fact that Harrison eventually sees the image of his own lips in the pickled guavas indicates that he wants to speak of such insensitivity:

Lips cropped off a poet. That's more like.
That's almost the sort of poet I think I am.
The lips of Orpheus fished up by a dyke
singing 'Women of Cuba Libre and Vietnam!'

The taste, though, taste! Ah, that could only be

('Women! Women! O *abajo* men,
the thought of it's enough to make you come!')

the honeyed yoni of Eurydice

and I am Orpheus going down again –

Thanks for the guavas soaked in Cuban rum.

(HSP, p. 55)

Attempting to rescue images emblematic of women from mummification Harrison updates the Orphic myth. Describing himself as an Orphic poet only left his lips (Orpheus was torn to pieces by women) Harrison indicates his passionate desire to become a spokesman for women; however it is clear that as a man he has little chance of being allowed to by the women themselves. His lips are 'fished up by a dyke', where 'dyke' as well as being a dam is also slang for a lesbian. There is distaste in the phrase 'fished up' as if the poet is something unclean or unnecessary. Indeed, the poet's memory of sexual pleasure is revitalised as he tastes the guavas and immediately places him back amongst the macho men ('it's enough to make you come!'). The result of this re-emergent sexuality is that the poet is 'Orpheus going down *again*' [my italics], a line which implies the repetition of the women's cropping of the poet's lips as well as the continuous attempt of an Orpheus to reclaim an Eurydice. Harrison's 'going down again' expresses his determination to hear women's opinions and perspectives which have been consigned to obscurity, and in this he is a more persistent Orphic and elegiac poet than Bion:

But ah, if I might have gone down like Orpheus to Tartarus or as once Odysseus or Alcides of yore, I too would speedily have come to the house of Pluteus, that thee perchance I might behold, and if thou singest to Pluteus, that I might hear what is thy song.^[96]

'*Guava Libre*' is a sonnet which, having rescued pornographic images from obscurity, depends on its audience responding to slogans, 'screen cults' and clichés about manliness and femininity to generate political analysis. For example, the chant within parentheses ('("Women! Women! O *abajo* men, / the thought of it's enough to make you come!"))' can be read as Harrison's attempt to make contact with a male audience which equates the

gaining of political power with sexual fantasies. The Spanish word '*abajo*' means going down, and as such is punningly related to its partner rhyme 'going down again' (given the context, 'going down' sounds like sexual slang for oral sex); the word '*abajo*' can also be a shout demanding the downfall of government. The line which ends the poem, 'Thanks for the guavas soaked in Cuban rum', returns us to a more normal realm of existence and implies retrospectively that the sonnet was a figment of the poet's imagination. Since Harrison's fantasising includes a statement of the sort of poet he thinks he is, it is possible to read '*Guava Libre*' as a critique of his own efforts to be a political poet. Indeed, the title refers both to the liberty which his imagination takes with his initial subject ('guavas soaked in Cuban rum') and to the political liberty sought by Cuba and Vietnam ('Cuba Libre and Vietnam!').

Tony Harrison's poetry makes the 'stock responses' which different readerships bring to literature an essential part of his search to be an 'accessible' poet. 'Stock responses'^[97] were defined by I. A. Richards as memories, by which he meant the reader's recognition of his or her experiences (including reading experiences) in what they read. We find further examples of stock response in *V.* where Harrison draws on the anger which many people would feel at the desecration of his parents' gravestone. Although sharing Harrison's outrage, there was uneasiness amongst several of *V.*'s reviewers that such anger had been made a subject for poetry:

Mr. Harrison, writing out of anger, reproduces with skillful contrivance these brutal utterances with a curious rage that sometimes seems to be something almost like relish. If the purpose of poetry is to enhance understanding then the unrestraint of much of this versified reportage is not poetry. You can read it on the walls all over the place.^[98]

In responding to Harrison's poem Butt's response is no more than an angry 'stock response' to graffiti and misses the irony inherent in the fact that his response may be equated with the graffitiist's response. Harrison is very alert to such ironies asking at one point 'What is it that this aggro act implies?' (HSP, p. 241); ostensibly referring to the skin's spraying of four letter words, this question can also be asked of the initial anger which led Harrison to produce *V.*. The poet deliberately neglects to suggest to whom 'this aggro act' is addressed. The skin is quick to pick him up on this: '*So what's a cri-de-couer cunt? Can't you speak the language that yer mam spoke*' (HSP, p. 241).

Despite the diversity of audience implied by Harrison's poetry, he aims the 'accessible language'^[99] (which he is proud of having learnt) at a cultured and literary readership. When Bruce Woodcock ran a workshop on Hull Truck's Youth Theatre's dramatised version of *V.* the discussion turned to the accuracy of Harrison's representation of a

skinhead:

Skins around nowadays were more likely to be into anarchy and punk than aerosolling football team names. It seemed from the group discussion that Harrison had taken the skin as a generically representative voice of disaffection but in a quite distorting way.^[100]

The group discussion emphasises the point that the reality of the skinhead's existence and activity is an illusion only sustained by the poet's imagination. Harrison's memories of his family can also be read as 'generically representative' of working class families, whose lives are only sustained by his efforts to write poetry. There are, however, serious consequences for developing a critical approach from texts 'which regard[s] art as distillation of personal experience'. Helen Vendler suggests that:

the first [of these consequences] is that criticism may dwell on the experience – either its biographical origin or its putative universality – to the exclusion of the art which has distilled the experience; or that it will lose itself in admiration and take on the slightly defensive tone of the insecure and evangelistic advocate.^[101]

Apart from his own experience, Harrison draws on other sources which help him to manifest the sense of oblivion in his texts, fed by generally accessible literary sources (clearly footnoted or referenced throughout his poetry) such as Greek drama and Darwinian narratives. Poems which draw on literary discussions of oblivion imply an educated audience capable of catching literary allusions, and I shall be concentrating on this audience by turning to consider Darwinian narratives and their relevance to the treatment of memory and oblivion in Harrison's poetry.

In 'Origins and Oblivion in Victorian Narrative' Gillian Beer refers to Darwin's and Lyell's writing in an attempt to recover an understanding of the Victorian reader's interpretation of and response to forgetfulness and oblivion. Beer claims that the theories that Darwin and Lyell put forward challenged their Victorian readers' concepts of oblivion and forgetfulness by giving them a new definition of extinction and a greatly extended awareness of time. They opened up the need for a mode of writing which could 'control a newly intensified sense of evanescence associated with concepts of geological time, of extinction, and of irreversible random genetic mutation. Each of these diminished the claims of memory.'^[102] A comparison of two poems entitled 'Heredity', one by Harrison and the other by Thomas Hardy, illustrates how Harrison has respected, yet moved on from, the Victorian vision of oblivion. The idea of heredity which emerges from Hardy's poem is of 'irreversible random genetic mutation', precariously avoiding oblivion:

I am the family face;
 Flesh perishes, I live on,
 Projecting trait and trace
 Through times to times anon,
 And leaping from place to place
 Over oblivion.^[103]

Hardy controls his sense of the randomness of genetic mutation by referring to an orderliness which he illustrates by using geometrical diction. However, the threat of oblivion is only temporarily held at bay by the verb 'projecting'. Reading between the lines of 'face', 'trace', 'place' we see the threatened fusion of 'on', 'anon,' and 'oblivion'. In Hardy's poem the inherited features of the human race can only 'be brought within language and narrative by the deciphering of traces and fragments, assemblage of record'.^[104] In recognising the fact that the past comes through to us in 'trait and trace' Hardy echoes the beliefs of Darwin and Lyell who, Beer argues, insisted that any understanding of the origins of the human race must accept 'our inevitable ignorance of the lived past' and question the value of memory:

Darwinian theory brings into question the value of memory. It highlights the extent of our inevitable ignorance of the lived past, both our own past and that of the physical order of the world.^[105]

Gillian Beer is sensitive to the need the Victorians had to narrate and make up a story of 'the lived past' prior to the present. She suggests that this need arose from a desire to answer several questions: 'Is the forgotten period simply a repetition of what is now enacted, or is it increasingly different, more alien, less retrievable? Is the present therefore less universal than it has seemed, more purely local and passing also?'^[106] In the second stanza of 'Heredity' Hardy is clearly aware of similar questions:

The years-heired feature that can
 In curve and voice and eye
 Despise the human span
 Of durance – that is I;
 The eternal thing in man,
 That heeds no call to die.^[107]

Here Hardy suggests that traits and traces which have been forgotten 'can' recur 'in curve and voice and eye' and 'Despise the human span / Of durance'. Although it is clear that what the past despises in the present is the brevity of life's existence, it is a shock to realise that the poet considers that the past may 'despise' the present, since the present is clearly related ('the years-heired feature') to the past. The present is certainly not simply a re-enactment of the past, Hardy bravely ignores the 'call to die'. The pun and rhyme on

'I' (meaning individuality) and an 'eye' (referring to one of the 'years-heired' features) is highly effective in emphasising the antagonistic connection between the past and present by merging individuality into an oblivious mass of features.

The poem by Tony Harrison which closely resembles Hardy's 'Heredity' is one of the small poems prefacing *The School of Eloquence* where the poet seems to relish the oblivion from which his poetry has grown. Imagining that the reader takes heredity seriously Harrison imagines his or her incomprehension at his talent:

*How you became a poet's a mystery!
Wherever did you get your talent from?
I say: I had two uncles, Joe and Harry –
One was a stammerer, the other dumb.*

(HSP, p. 111)

Harrison retrieves the memory of two members of his family from a past generation. He tells an unlikely story stating that he inherited his poetic talent from an uncle who stammered and one who was dumb. The story is in response to the patronising question '*Wherever did you get your talent from?*'. 'Heredity' prepares us to expect that a forgotten past may be the poet's subject; the reader who says '*How you became a poet's a mystery!*' has clearly chosen to ignore the fact that there was the potential for poetic talent in Harrison's background. In several of the sonnets in *Art & Extinction* Harrison draws on the Victorian metaphor in which the material world is treated as 'a history of the world imperfectly kept, and written in a changing dialect'.^[108] The sonnet sequence *Art & Extinction* displays a style of writing which reminds us of Darwin's and Lyell's narratives concerning oblivion and extinction. In the sequence's fourth sonnet, 'Loving Memory' (for Teresa Stratas) the poet becomes an 'interpreter of nature' and the lessons nature can provide concerning man's position in a world filled with geological signs of oblivion and forgetting. Gillian Beer observes that Darwinian narratives imitate Lyell's tendency to make metaphors from writing talk about geological and historical features of landscape. Beer quotes Darwin:

For my part following out Lyell's metaphor, I look at the natural geological record, as a history of the world imperfectly kept, and written in a changing dialect; of this history we possess the last volume alone, relating only to two or three countries. Of this volume, only here and there a short Chapter has been preserved; and of each page, only here and there a few lines. Each word of the slowly changing language in which the history is supposed to be written, being more or less different in the interrupted succession of Chapters, may represent the apparently abruptly changed forms of life, entombed in our consecutive, but widely separated formations.^[109]

Accepting that we can only reach an incomplete understanding of the history of the

world Darwin attempts to explain difference between times past and present by equating geological changes in a landscape with 'the slowly changing language in which the history is supposed to be written'. Darwin's claim that the language history is written in is a changing dialect implies a desire to include a sense of the local in the evolution of language. By calling his text a record, and comparing Chapters to tombs, Darwin's narrative raises the issue of how accurately a text can be read as representative of memory. As Gillian Beer has written:

Darwinian theory brings into question the value of memory. It highlights the extent of our inevitable ignorance of the lived past, both our own past and that of the physical order of the world.^[110]

'Our inevitable ignorance of the lived past' is an important theme in Tony Harrison's sonnet 'Loving Memory' (HSP, p.185). The first three lines of Tony Harrison's poem make landmarks metaphors for a slowly changing historical record:

The fosses where Caractacus fought Rome
blend with grey bracken and become a blur
above the Swedish Nightingale's last home.

(HSP, p.185)

Looking at the natural environment Harrison finds that traces of the past are physically evident in the landscape ('The fosses where Caractacus fought Rome') blend with a feature which has particular private poignancy. The poet is drawn to the last home of the 'Swedish Nightingale' (Jenny Lind) because he wants to think about and recall his wife (Teresa Stratas is a singer too). The words 'blend' and 'blur' and the rhyme of 'Rome' with 'home' fuse the factual traces of Roman history and the poet's remembered associations of the 'Swedish Nightingale' and her lyrics. The fusion suggests that personal memory is crucial to the way in which the poet interprets nature and faces up to the oblivions it posits (the Roman empire and Jenny Lind have both passed on). Despite Harrison's faith in the value of remembering, the privacy of his memory does highlight an inevitable ignorance of the lived past. In the final lines of the sonnet Harrison meets two women outside a graveyard who have never heard of Jenny Lind:

I ask two women leaving with dead daffodils:
Where's Jenny Lind's grave, please? They both say: *Who?*

(HSP, p.185)

The women question the value of memory and memorial as a response to oblivion. Even though the women have visited the graveyard they have not read the epitaph to Jenny

Lind. The words of a memorial obviously do not address every passer by as Wordsworth forcibly argued they did:

'Pause Traveller!' The reader of an epitaph is the audience Wordsworth wanted: Everyman. Such an epitaph is read by every passer-by, yet is removed from the busy world; it records a private event, a private sorrow, yet one which all men have known or will know. 'It is concerning all and for all.'^[111]

Read with the knowledge of other authors' and poets' dilemmas about the force of memory, Harrison's use of memory clearly provides understanding of the extinctions, deaths and losses which happen around us without the extreme pessimism of Darwinian narrative or the over-optimism of Wordsworth. Instead the forcefulness of Harrison's writing about memory relies on an immediate reader or listener whom he can draw into intimacy. His poetry is 'directed not to the solitary reader, but to an audience'.^[112] There is an element of panic in the way he hurries past the hospital and arrests the first human beings he sees, panic which is soothed by his recollection of a text he has read and the memory of passion shared with his wife:

Death keeps all hours, but graveyards close at nights.
I hurry past the Malvern Hospital
where a nurse goes round small wards and puts on lights
and someone there's last night begins to fall.

'The oldest rocks this earth can boast', these hills,
packed with extinction, make me burn for you.

(HSP, p. 185)

Despite the poet's sensitivity to signs of extinction in the formations of the Malvern Hills memory of his living wife is not diminished but fanned into a strong flame. Having established Harrison's interest in challenging the oblivion and extinction noticeable in changing landscapes and natural resources, and the parallels his writing has with the same issues addressed in Darwinian narratives we can begin to understand why Harrison is drawn to elegy. As well as being a lament for a dearly loved person, elegy is 'specifically about what is missing'. The evanescence suggested by the lines 'these hills, / packed with extinction' makes the poet 'burn' with loving memories of his wife. The verb 'burn' suggests that as well as countering extinction memory may be self-consuming. By analysing Harrison's metaphorical use of coal and its relationship with fire, we can understand more fully the role Harrison envisages for memory within a world filled with manifestations of oblivion.

The imagery of evolution and geological stratas is employed by Harrison in his elegy V. to extend the poet's sense of time:

Not train departure time, and not Town Hall
with the great white clock face I can see,
coal, that began, with no man here at all,
as 300 million-year-old plant debris.

(V. p. 25)

One of the characteristics of *V.* (well illustrated in the stanza I have quoted above by the list of things Harrison does not choose to see and which obstruct his vision) is the tortuous way in which his verse settles upon its main subject matter. 'Clanking and creaking like old machinery yet formal in the extreme (abab lines) we are never allowed to forget what a contrived and artificial activity poetry is.'^[113] Morrison's general comments about the nature of Harrison's verse need to be qualified, however. In the above stanza the poet labours to see coal because it has no connections with mankind's artificial time-tabling of time. In his reference to 'coal' Harrison reminds the reader of vast acres of unrecorded time. The poet then relates himself to these unrecorded times by suggesting that instead of ash people will scoop 'clinker' out of his cremation urn. (Clinker is a hard mass formed by the fusion of the impurities of coal such as iron ore.) Therefore the coal that he burns in his grate at home has already begun to manifest forgotten lives and years:

Home, home to my woman, never to return
till sexton or survivor has to cram
the bits of clinker scooped out of my urn
down through the rose-roots to my dad and mam.

Home, home to my woman, where the fire's lit
these still chilly mid-May evenings, home to you,
and perished vegetation from the pit
escaping insubstantial up the flue.

(V. p. 29)

The repetition of the words 'Home, home to my woman' which open these two stanzas encourages us to read them in parallel. Bits of clinker from the poet's urn together with the rose-roots are such stuff as 'perished vegetation' is made of. Despite Harrison's insistence that he will not return to his parents' grave until his own death, his return to a home hearth where the 'perished vegetation' is clearly made up of such things as rose roots which live off the remains of his 'mam and dad' means that he and his wife are warmed by the combustion of lived pasts and personal memories. After using coal and its associated features to manifest his conviction that personal memory is consigned to forgotten periods of creativity, Harrison goes on to associate coal with passionate artistry:

Listening to *Lulu*, in our hearth we burn,
as we hear the high Cs rise in stereo,
what was once lush swamp club-moss and tree-fern
at least 300 million years ago.

(V. p. 29)

The fuel sustaining the domestic hearth now includes the lived feelings which the poet and his wife have between them. This time the mention of coal's initial creation communicates sensuous fertility as if the poet is close to that vegetable compounding.

The repetitive web of references at this point in V. to the first creation of coal shows how richly symbolic Harrison finds coal. The word-play he sustains around coal and the extended sense of time it represents is remarkable; so, the phrase 'coke-plant' moves us from the vegetation that created coal all those millions of years ago through the domestic hearth to the miner's strike of 1984:

As the coal with reddish dust cools in the grate
on the late-night national news we see
police v. pickets at a coke-plant gate,
old violence and old disunity.

(V. p. 30)

A cooling coal was the image Shelley chose to describe his mind in creation: 'The mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness.'^[14] The coal which cools in Harrison's grate is linked to national news as well as to the poet's imaginative thought. The images of violence which fade from the television screen mimic the fading coal; 'the day's last images recede to first a glow' (V, p. 30), and Harrison's decision to rhyme 'glow' with 'know' implies that the coal-like 'glow' feeds his imaginative mind:

Turning to love, and sleep's oblivion, I know
what the UNITED that the skin sprayed *has* to mean.

(V, p. 30)

There is, however, no 'invisible influence' affecting Harrison's mind; it is 'love' which works on his creative mind and influences the way Harrison reads the sprayed word 'UNITED'. Yet Harrison's mind is also fed by 'old violence and old disunity', the word 'old' implying that he is tired of the fact that such industrial disputes and wars seem unending. The layers of history, experience and literary tradition that evolving 'coal creating forces' can represent makes coal an ideal motif for Harrison's creative mind. His references to coal

display his concern with an industrial past, the comfort of domesticity and, at the end of *V.*, a consideration of Wordsworth's elegiac attempts to retrieve an ancient past in comparison with Harrison's own. For Harrison focuses on Wordsworth's poem 'A slumber did my spirit seal', quoting Wordsworth's phrase 'diurnal course':^[115]

Victory? For vast, slow, coal-creating forces
that hew the body's seams to get the soul.
Will Earth run out of her 'diurnal courses'
before repeating her creation of black coal?

(V. p. 32)

The 'body' that Harrison refers to here is, as I have suggested in Chapter 1, 'Man', represented throughout the poem by the figure of the poet standing in front of his parents' grave on Beeston Hill. This, combined with the fact that the verb 'create' used in the phrase 'coal-creating forces', makes a link between coal and artistic creation, encourages us to assess Harrison's success at making himself the mouthpiece for a silenced past. (The 'seams' remind us of 'the lowest worked-out seam' which lie beneath the buried family dead.) Harrison refuses to believe that the past is as inaccessible as Wordsworth implies. He even thinks that it is possible to retrieve a soul if you labour hard enough. In *V.* the poet struggles to have his themes and memories heard and recognised as art. Burning coal extracted from pits which will eventually be worked out Harrison hopes to find some traces of inarticulate generations. Indeed, a worked-out pit manifests a specific area of oblivion which Tony Harrison is interested in. In 'Working' he describes the hardship of Patience Kershaw who worked in the mines:

Wherever hardship held its tongue the job
's breaking the silence of the worked-out-gob.*

(HSP, p. 124)

'The worked-out-gob' or translated into RP 'The lowest worked-out seam' is a mouth. The graveyard Harrison considers at the beginning of *V.* 'stands above a worked-out pit'. It is threatening to become 'a great memory hole'^[116] which will disturb the dead from their places of rest and create a 'rabblement of bone'. It is by burning the coal which has been extracted from pits like the one under Beeston Graveyard that Harrison manages to halt temporarily the inevitable consignment of the tongue-tied to oblivion.

* Harrison provides his own footnote to 'Working' to emphasise his equation of 'gob' with mouth and coal mining. 'Note: 'Gob' an old Northern coal-mining word for the space left after the coal has been extracted. Also of course, the mouth, the speech.'

In 'A slumber did my spirit seal' the word 'seal' implies that Wordsworth achieves consolation by trying to sleep and forget. The certitude with which he declares knowledge of the woman's situation after death is part of his determination to console himself:

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.^[117]

Quoting Wordsworth and questioning the determination he displays to return to normal rhythms of life by numbing himself to the dead woman's existence, Harrison engages the reader with Wordsworth's poem. The question he asks; 'Will Earth run out of her "diurnal courses" / before repeating her creation of black coal?' thinly veils the threat of permanent oblivion ('run out') which Harrison is sensitive to. Yet the moment also draws in the context of Wordsworth's poem to suggest that we cannot persuade ourselves for ever of the normality of things when the opposite is true. Harrison is coming to the close of his 'creation' and so the question is also asking the reader if things will have changed before he (the poet) writes another poem.

Throughout his writing, Harrison is haunted by fire's apocalyptic alliance with memory as well as its burning of coal. Flaming extinction is introduced by the language of nuclear war dominant in the sonnet sequence *Anno 42* ('A sequence of seven sonnets written 42 years after VJ Day in August 1945'^[118]). In 'Birds of Japan' the all-consuming extinction which fire can achieve dominates Harrison's treatment of his subject. The subject of Harrison's poem consequently becomes extinction (the birds) without trace or evidence of previous life:

Did the birds burst into song as they ignited
above billowing waves of cloud up in the sky,
hosannahs too short lived to have alighted
on a Bomb age Basho, or a Hokusai?

Apostles of that pinioned Pentecost
of chirrupings cremated on the wing
will have to talk their ghosts down, or we're lost.
Until we know what they sang, who can sing?

(PR, p. 6)

The birds become metaphors for a serious apocalyptic message. As Damian Grant has recognised, 'the sort of poet he is requires an apocalyptic metaphor: such as tongues of

fire'.^[119] In *The School of Eloquence* tongues of fire are associated with the branks[†] of mortal speech that kept his father down:

Harrison uses the phrase [tongues of fire] in several poems, suggesting that the image of the gift of tongues to the timorous Apostles is obviously very real to him, personal and powerful. He uses this image to convey the horrific irony in the fact that his father's tongue takes fire only at his cremation. 'I thought how his cold tongue burst into flame, but only literally', after a lifetime in which he had hungered for 'release from mortal speech / That kept him down'.^[120]

In 'Birds of Japan' Harrison attempts to understand what motivates mankind to commit an act as destructive as dropping the atom bomb on Hiroshima. As well as referring to lessons offered by nature, his vocabulary evokes several different esoteric (poetry addressed to the initiated) groups. Initially people with geological and chemical knowledge of places where natural phenomena can kill appear to be his audience:

Campi Phlegraei, Lake Nyos of Wum,
their sulphur could asphyxiate whole flocks
but combustibility had not yet come
to the femto-seconds of the *Fiat Nox*:
men made magma, flesh made fumaroles,
first mottled by the flash to brief mofettes
and Hiroshima's fast pressurising souls
hissed through the fissures in mephitic jets.

(PR, p. 6)

The reference to '*Fiat Nox*' echoes God's creative command '*fiat lux*' (let there be light), and the phrase 'men made' which follows implies that man's ingenuity has gone too far in taking lessons from God's initial creation. Men have turned themselves into magma (a layer of molten rock beneath the earth's crust) and have made flesh 'fumaroles'.

'Birds of Japan' is a figurative sonnet, approaching the terror and devastation of the nuclear bomb via nature, the birds. Having observed the fact that there is a precedent for their death (but not their combustibility) Harrison swiftly moves from the natural environment to a cultural one. Responding to Japanese prints he notices that the pictures by the painters 'Bomb age Basho' and 'Hokusai' do not include birds. In the eight lines which end the sonnet Harrison makes reference to knowledge gleaned from study in the arts, and implies that this artistic readership is one which condones nuclear warfare. By combining the concept of 'holocaust' with 'Pentecost' and creating a new word 'Pentecaust' (PR, p. 6), Harrison both averts a holocaust and implies that apostalising led to it. A Miltonic echo within the lines of 'The Birds of Japan' suggests that Harrison is

† A brank is a mouth clamp.

aware that it is too easy merely to pronounce judgement against those 'Apostles' who find arguments for nuclear warfare. In *Samson Agonistes* 'Virtue' is the bird which engenders its own 'holocaust' in just retaliation for Samson's death, and at the same time becomes a metaphor for hope after this self-engendered 'holocaust':

So Virtue, given for lost,
Depressed and overthrown as seemed,
Like that self begotten bird
In the Arabian woods embost,
That no second knows nor third,
And lay erewhile a holocaust,
From out her ashy womb now teemed,
Revives, reflourishes, then vigourous most
When most unactive deemed;
And, though her body die, her fame survives,
A secular bird, ages of lives.^[121]

Since Samson is favoured by God the holocaust proceeds from the just anger of an offended God. The word 'holocaust' is therefore made an approved act of revenge. Milton's metaphoric treatment of this ruthlessness lessens the horror of the fact that God condones the obliteration of a people. However, whilst Milton uses metaphor to display the justness of God's revenge, Harrison finds it difficult not to apportion blame. It is important to draw attention to the fact that the 'Apostles' Harrison addresses are 'Apostles of that pinioned Pentecast'. There is sadistic cruelty contained in the verb 'pinioned', which implies Harrison's own distaste for what the 'Apostles' advocate. Therefore, when in the final lines of the sonnet the poet writes that the 'Apostles' will have to listen for the song of the dead birds, we sense that he is taking no responsibility for the devastation himself but rather suggesting this as the only reparation the initiated can make.

The elegy in which Harrison faces up to the consequences of his own apocalyptic metaphors is 'The Mother of the Muses' (an elegy for the death of Emmanuel Stratas). In this poem humankind and books have replaced coal as fuel for fire whilst the fire remains symbolic of human callousness and censorship. Harrison has deliberately made himself solitary in a remote Canadian cabin and sitting in front of a hearth he tries to remember fragments of words:

After I've lit the fire and looked outside
and found us snowbound and the roads all blocked,
anxious to prove my mind's not ossified
and the way into that storehouse still unlocked,
as its easier to remember poetry,
I try to remember, but soon find it hard,
a speech from *Prometheus* a boy from Greece B.C.
scratched, to help him learn it, on a shard.^[122]

As Harrison sits before the fire (the gift of Prometheus) it reminds him of the other gift that Prometheus gave man, 'the gift of writing'. The poet sits, threatened by an empty whiteness, the obliterating, isolating power of snow. As Harrison sits trying to use his gifts of writing and memory (so often the engenderer of creativity in his early poetry) the greatest danger he faces is apathy. 'I try to remember, but soon find it hard.' Harrison is eventually spurred by love to make an effort to remember the lost words (the personal associations of the visit which he and his wife paid to the Home where her father lived touching him keenly in his apathetic state), but the way in which his effort tails off into dots shows that the poet's awareness of oblivion is very strong:

I remember the museum, and I could eke
his scratch marks out, and could complete
the ... however many lines there were of Greek
and didn't think it then much of a feat.^[123]

A comparison of Harrison's awareness of the oblivion in his consciousness in a poem like 'Cyprus and Cedar' with that displayed in 'The Mother of the Muses' indicates that as a maturer poet Harrison can no longer stabilise oblivion and forgetfulness in his consciousness by using vivid images. In 'Cyprus and Cedar' Harrison values the efforts of the lily-like 'peace' to keep reproducing:

Peace like a lily pad on swamps of pain –
floating's its only way of being linked.
This consciousness of ours that reads and writes
drifts on a darkness deeper than the night's.
Above that blackness, buoyed on the extinct,
peace, pure white, floats flowering in the brain,

and fades ...

(HSP, p. 233)

Clearly, the threat of extinction has profoundly affected the consciousness which 'reads and writes'. Harrison chooses a particularly vivid and beautiful flower to be his example of nature's inevitable changes, and to represent metaphorically peace's efforts to balance

oblivion. Thus, moments of peace and moments of beauty are declared to be shortlived in the writer's consciousness. 'The Mother of The Muses' is structured by the poet's inability to remember the words from *Prometheus* he once saw scratched on a shard. His strain to remember becomes the theme of the poem, reflecting both the state of mind of the old people he saw in the 'Home' and the blur that is descending over the memories of the atrocities of World War Two. In *Greek Fire*^[124] Oliver Taplin notes how important fragments of the lived past are to Tony Harrison's creativity. To explain how artists like Harrison can make fragmentation positive, he quotes critical responses to a contemporary painting by Lisa Milroy called *Fragments*. (Milroy's picture was an unframed display of fragments of Greek pottery.) Critical responses to this painting echoed the Darwinian belief that man is inevitably ignorant of his past. A critic in *The Times* wrote that 'the composition leaking off the picture's edges, tells you not about Greek culture but about your inevitable ignorance of it'. Taplin argues for a different interpretation:

The very fragmentation [is] inexhaustively suggestive and resilient against final containment [and] the receptive mind can always make a new pattern out of the pieces and seek self-knowledge.^[125]

In 'The Mother of The Muses' Harrison focuses on a piece of pottery which has words written on it. The words are not quite consigned to oblivion; they are preserved in a museum somewhere in Greece and hazily in the poet's mind. However, in recording their elusiveness (Harrison takes the whole poem to remember the first few words) the poet is illustrating a natural propensity to forgetfulness which, as Gillian Beer has remarked, every reader suffers from. However, even if forgetting is any reader's most common experience, whilst remembering is an achievement, there are times as Gillian Beer suggested in 'Origins and Oblivion in Victorian Narrative' when forgetfulness has serious consequences and the assumption that it is inevitable must therefore be challenged:

There are times when the act of forgetting becomes a crisis and the recognition of oblivion becomes threatening to a community.^[126]

The fact that images of oblivion in 'The Mother of The Muses' are much sharper than Harrison's memory of the words on the shard implies that the poet feels a crisis point has been reached:

The Memory, Mother of the Muses, bit.
 Prometheus, in words I do recall reciting
 but can't quote now, and they're so apposite,
 claiming he gave mankind the gift of writing,

Along with fire the Gods withheld from men
 who'd lived like ants in caves deprived of light
 they could well end up living in again
 if we let what flesh first roasted on ignite
 a Burning of the Books far more extreme
 than any screeching Führer could inspire,
 the dark side of the proud Promethean dream
 our globe enveloped in his gift of fire.^[127]

The lines ruthlessly record images of destruction, and the censorship and human cruelty that these public celebrations of extermination manifest. It is only within a context of love that dark forces can be held off. At the end of his poem the gifts of writing and fire combine to create a poem of memory by lamplight on St. Valentine's Day. The poem ends trusting in fragile things, even the smallest traces have major significance (personal and public). Harrison's inspiring muse (Mnemosyne/Memory) not content to lament or accept passively 'what is missing'.

Memory inspires Harrison to remember birds which are absent from the snow-filled scene. Unlike the 'Birds of Japan' those recalled in the final stanza of 'The Mother of The Muses' leave traces:

Country people used to say today's
 the day the birds sense spring and choose their mates
 and trapped exotics in the Dresden blaze
 were flung together in their flame-fledged fates.
 The snow in the street outside's at least 6ft.
 I look for life, and find the only sign's,
 like words left for, or *by*, someone from Crete,
 a bird's tracks, like blurred Greek, for Valentine's.^[128]

Memories of nature are being used to express fresh life, new beginnings and love. The mixture of this regenerating significance with the idea that a 'terrible beauty is born' and commemorated on 14th February each year shows how little it takes to make memory a 'baleful' or 'beneficial' thing. To end this chapter I examine the significance of pastoral in Harrison's later elegiac writing.

Eric Smith has suggested that pastoral can be an abstract world the poet could retire to:

Elegy is specifically about what is missing and also about what is more certainly known to

have been formerly possessed. It is a crucial and intimate situation removed, very often, to the abstracted world of pastoral. What is missing may be a particular person or a particular quality of life, or it may be both.^[129]

However, pastoral in Harrison's poetry draws attention to the raw shock and horror that the poet insists we should feel when facing up to loss; it serves to remind us that there is no abstract world we can retire to. The children of Mnemosyne have been mutilated and changed by twentieth-century concepts of oblivion almost beyond recognition. In 'Facing up to the Muses' Harrison remarks on the weariness, darkness and staleness which surrounds the Muses' haunt and taints their 'fountain of inspiration on Helicon':

This weariness of the nine, this erosion of the affirmative spirit in our times, this darkness, this nephos on Helicon has been made darker by two World Wars, the terrors of Nazism, and the fearful conflagrations unleashed on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 creating the literal poliokrotophoi of Hesiod's fifth Age. . . . It's not only our lateness in history but the dark catastrophes of our age that undermine creativity at its very roots.^[130]

Exploring Harrison's use of pastoral we can see a poet playing on his literary readers' formal expectations of an abstract and tranquil world whilst barely keeping in check his own sense of outrage at mankind's persistent attempts to devise more and more effective instruments of destruction and cruelty. In *A Kumquat for John Keats* Tony Harrison draws on the pastoral muse to illustrate how this muse has lost some of the former qualities it held in Keats' time. In 'Facing up to the Muses'^[131] Harrison had observed that Keats had been aware of the powerful effect the growing awareness of oblivion was having on the muses. When Keats looked to Mount Helicon in *Endymion* he had seen that 'all is dark / Around thine top'. In the same address to the Classical Association Harrison quotes his own pastoral scene appropriate for Mount Helicon. It explodes in his face:

... a century of history on this earth
between John Keats' death and my own birth –
years like an open crater, gory, grim,
with bloody bubbles leering at the rim;
a thing no bigger than an urn explodes
and ravishes all silence and all odes.
Flora asphyxiated by foul air,
unknown to either Keats or Lemprière,
dehydrated Naiads, Dryad amputees,
dragging themselves through slagscapes with no trees,
a shirt of Nessus fire that gnaws and eats
children half the age of dying Keats...

(HSP, pp. 193–194)

There is a distance of history and dark catastrophe between Harrison and Keats. The

scattered fragments of reference to Keats' poetry and the broken use of his diction show us that Harrison feels that the possibility of human extinction brought about by nuclear war has affected a poetic consciousness. The lines I have quoted echo Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn':

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Silvan historian. . . ^[132]

The urn fosters a pastoral past, and unviolated it maintains a silence about this past. Tony Harrison is determined to molest silence. In his couplets not only has 'unravished' been converted to 'ravishes', but the ravishing is not of 'the bride' but of 'silence'. The fragmentation of Keats' words illustrate the destruction of pastoral assumptions about time. Keats admires the 'slow time' the urn preserves. The fragments left by the destructive nuclear force (the urn is like a nuclear bomb) show how eager Harrison is to understand a sudden and violent manifestation of human extinction. Harrison writes *A Kumquat for John Keats* as an elegy to the passing of youth. He parallels his youth with Keats', marking Keats' death (another use of elegy) and the passing of a quality of life (youth) at the same time. The implicit link between nuclear extinction of life and Keats' sudden death is an unusual and devastating investigation of death. Maintaining formality whilst dealing with the theme of death, Harrison's style takes its example from Palladas. When translating Palladas he valued the Roman poet for his invigorating and unique approach to death and historical change:

What is unique and invigorating about Palladas is that there is no sense at all of 'gracious' surrender either to the inevitability of death or to historical change. ^[133]

Palladas teaches Tony Harrison how a poet can use his poetry to defy the despair of oblivion while expressing it powerfully at the same time. Palladas treats Death brusquely:

Agony comes from brooding about death.
Once dead, a man's spared all that pain.
Weeping for the dead's a waste of breath –
they're lucky, they can't die again. ^[134]

Palladas' pointedness is 'somehow the formal equivalent of despair'. ^[135] This comment refers to that phenomenon whereby the more strongly someone asserts something the weaker the reader often feels their case. It is Palladas' formality in the face of oblivion, death, and despair that Harrison values very highly:

There is a strong sense of form in Palladas and it is something which barely seems able to contain the apoplectic energy of his nihilistic scorn. It is as if the formal endeavour and metrical tension

were all that stood between Palladas and choking silence, sheer cosmic exasperation and what Beckett's *Lucky* called 'divine aphasia' [a defect of memory].^[136]

Form is eloquent in Harrison's elegies. In *A Kumquat for John Keats* Harrison uses couplets. As we read the poem we are immediately struck by the ringing rhymes. Realising that we are reading an elegy, we begin to argue with this effect and ask whether its rough shod and raw music is really gracious enough for the memory of Keats. Harrison labours for a raw verse. By being so pointed he makes the couplet 'the formal equivalent of despair'.^[137] The regular, often obvious, rhymes express a fear of not knowing anything by trying to state links between words through rhyme. Couplets can also express unending circles in which arguments can travel. They are self-sufficient units as well as parts of a narrative.

The couplet has traditionally been treated as a whole, a suitable form for expressing wholeness (even if to criticise this). In his *Essay on Man* Pope celebrates an ideal – the spreading of charitable virtue represented by ripples of water circling out to 'Friend, parent, neighbour', and then even further to country and the human race:

Wide and more wide, the o'er flowings of the mind
Take e'vry creature in of every kind.^[138]

This is a use of the couplet form to express the individual's ability to be open-minded within limits. Pope is confident that the universe is bounded:

God loves from whole to parts but human soul
Must rise from individual to the whole.^[139]

Another exponent of couplets, George Crabbe, also embraces the significance of circles in his couplets:

Though mild benevolence our Priest possess'd,
'Twas but by wishes or by words express'd:
Circles in water as they wider flow
The less conspicuous in their progress grow.^[140]

Crabbe uses couplets as tight circular expressions of his characters' limitations. His balanced rhythm 'wider' flows into 'the less', makes us feel how naturally men fail within the bounds set out for them, and how natural it is to have opposites around you in life. The bounding nature of the couplet together with its circularity is especially apt for Harrison's vision of the world, since he tends to view the world as if it is a Greek circular orchestra where celebrant and sufferer can exist together (this is something I examine more fully in Chapter 3).

Circular imagery persists in *A Kumquat for John Keats*. Much of the fruit mentioned is round; grapefruits are 'moon-like globes', tangerines are like 'sunshine'. The kumquat itself is 'scarcely cherry sized' and has all the qualities of a good couplet:

that Micanopy kumquat that I ate
whole, straight off the tree, sweet pulp and sour skin –
or was it sweet outside and sour within?

(HSP, p. 192)

The kumquat has a round boundary which embraces opposites. It is impossible to say which of the skin and flesh is the bitterer. Eating kumquats is like eating couplets, eating despair and joy at the same time. Harrison's couplets are also 'expressive vehicles for a vulnerable and frustrated sensibility and a method of distancing or critically placing that sensibility'.^[141] The poet is worried by the need to find a way of expressing the essence of his 'prime' of life. The very first couplet of the poem announces this worry:

Today I found the right fruit for my prime,
not orange, not tangelo, and not lime.

(HSP, p. 192)

Although the first half of the couplet seems confident in its manner of expressing certainty, the list of fruits in the second half tells us how much effort the poet has had to exert to find 'the right fruit'. The list implies that the memory of this quest is as important as the discovery itself. This indicates the crucial difference between Harrison's and Palladas' use of form to defy oblivion. Harrison uses the formality of couplets to express despair as pointedly as Palladas, but he is also determined to emphasise that memory is not erased by the despair generated in us by our sense of oblivion. Palladas lives for the moment alone:

Each new day break we are born again.
All our life till now has flown away.
What we did yesterday's already gone.
All we have left of life begins today.

Old men, don't complain of all your years.
Those that have vanished are no longer yours!^[142]

In this poem Palladas plays with the mnemonic function of the epigram, using it to say that we have no past. The friction between function and meaning undermines the speaker, leaving his poem a crumbling edifice of form where the meaning erases the structure as

fast as it is written. There is subject matter in *A Kumquat for John Keats* which threatens to erase the couplets as fast as they are written:

As strong sun burns away the dawn's grey haze
I pick a kumquat and the branches spray
cold dew in my face to start the day.
The dawn's molasses make the citrus gleam
still in the orchards of the groves of dream.
The limes, like Galway after weeks of rain,
glow with a greenness that is close to pain,
the dew-cooled surfaces of fruit that spent
all last night flaming in the firmament.
The new day dawns. O days ! My spirit greets
the kumquat with the spirit of John Keats.
O kumquat, comfort for not dying young,
both sweet and bitter, bless the poet's tongue!
I burst the whole fruit chilled by morning dew
against my palate. Fine, for 42!

(HSP, pp. 194–195)

Nature, which could have been made suitable as a pastoral background for lament, is used to express the agony of existence constantly aware of obliterating powers. The sun is 'strong' and 'burns away the dawn's grey haze'. Each new day seems to erase the previous one. However each day also has traces of the previous day in it as it begins. The dew is both tears lamenting days gone by and a sign of the fresh new day. Memory, lament for the dead, and the pastoral muse combine in the pun on 'morning dew'. That dew has the power to keep fruit cool in a 'flaming' firmament. As the poet takes in that coolness, he also takes in the power to see coolly in a heated environment; the power to embrace both the celebratory and suffering aspects of life; the power to mourn intensely and sensitively without being self-absorbed. Realising this, the reader no longer has a need to resist the obviousness of Harrison's rhymes. Rhyme, like everything else in this elegy, is not content simply to be; it must act and live.

As well as proffering a vision of a world laid waste by nuclear war Harrison can write more domestic pastoral. V. is an elegy which seizes on socially approved actions, class distinctions and the distance poetry has put between Harrison and his father. Pastoral becomes part of an unpretentious attempt to make sense of these things. Harrison discusses the social significance of consolation expressed by a pastoral art which finds its references in surface nature:

When I first came here 40 years ago
with my dad to 'see my grandma' I was 7.
I helped dad with the flowers. He let me know
she'd gone to join my grandad up in Heaven.

My dad who came each week to bring fresh flowers
came home with clay stains on his trouser knees.
Since my parents' deaths I've spent 2 hours
made up of odd 10 minutes such as these.

(V. p. 12)

On the occasion of a death Harrison is not using the pastoral to transport the reader into an abstract world, or floridly to lament what is missing. The act of placing flowers on his grandmother's grave is an unpretentious and modest one. It 'dignified the family plot'. The pastoral is used by the poet to show his respect for his father's social act of remembering. The memory that the poet has of his father coming home with clay stains on his trousers reminds us of the ways mankind has found to console itself, while expressing the poet's conviction that no abstract worlds or afterworlds exist. Later he says 'I don't believe in afterlife at all' (V. p. 15). Harrison's pastoral holds firmly to this world and to now.

In *Adonais* Keats' corpse breathes forth flowers and Shelley claims that 'they illumine death':

The leprous corpse, touched by this spirit tender,
Exhales itself in flowers of gentle breath;
Like incarnations of the stars, when splendour
Is changed to fragrance, they illumine death
And mock the merry worm that wakes beneath;
Nought we know, dies. Shall that alone which knows
Be as a sword consumed before the sheath
By sightless lightening?^[143]

The body of the poet is treated with religious reverence. The blossom from the May trees in V. proves an equally essential part of the poet's expression. Coming home from Beeston Hill graveyard Harrison hangs up his clothes and 'from my parka hood / may and apple petals, browned and creased, / fall onto the carpet and bring back the flood / of feelings their first falling had released' (V, p. 31). These petals can be considered equivalent to the poet's laurel wreath. Indeed, the blossom gives expression to a flood of feeling connected with his own childhood. In addition, the may blossom connects the poet to the youths who, like the skinhead, are not interested in the past; 'not so loud they'd want to raise a ghost'. There is a tree in blossom in the graveyard which boy footballers 'boot their ball

at all day' and mimic the older skinheads showing off their footballing skills around the graves:

5 kids, with one in goal, play 2-a-side.
When the ball bangs on the hawthorn that's one post
and petals fall they hum *Here Comes the Bride*
though not so loud they'd want to rouse a ghost.

They boot the ball on purpose at the trunk
and make the tree shed showers of shrivelled may.
I look at this word graffitied by some drunk
and I'm in half a mind to let it stay.

(V. p. 13)

Harrison invests in the pastoral image the destructive urge, the potential for growth, and love. By the end of *V.* a tree in the graveyard has become as expressive an epitaph as the living, remembering figure of the poet. For this reason Harrison invites us to:

... choose a day like I chose in mid-May
or earlier when apple and hawthorn tree,
no matter if boys boot their ball all day,
cling to their blossoms and won't shake them free.

(V, p. 32)

Throughout his poetry Harrison displays remarkable versatility in his treatment of memory. Working with the personal, literary and historical fragments which create his sense of time past and which I am calling memory, he develops a public voice for poetry, which demands the reader's direct engagement. Harrison achieves this by harrying or reasoning, but it is always in the interests of 'speaking publicly as a poet'.^[144] Having argued for the quality of his personal memories I now propose to explore Harrison's skill at working with memories in a less personal way. To do this I turn to an art closely linked to elegy: translation.

Chapter 3

Memory and Links between Elegy and Translations

All my work comes out of the same preoccupation [translation] – it's one writing, but it's difficult to explain exactly how they are linked.^[145]

Harrison's preoccupation with Greek translation is well documented, not least by the poet himself. In conversation with Richard Hoggart Harrison suggests that the reason why he is so preoccupied with Greek drama is because Greek dramatists can help him develop a public voice in poetry which seeks to confront the blackness of contemporary times:

To learn from that literature seems to me to be very important, one of the great lessons I have learned. Our times surely have some of the blackest things one can imagine in them. How do you think about them and still have the heart and appetite for life? The Greeks do that.^[146]

However, as we have seen in Chapter 2, memories of daily living and personal contact with his parents are also important to Harrison. Many of Harrison's childhood memories are inextricably linked with his experiencing and reading texts in foreign languages suggesting that personal memories are part of 'the same quest for a public poetry'^[147] which Harrison engages with when translating Greek drama. The idea that the most private memory can be as powerful as the 'great lessons' proffered to the public by Greek drama is best supported by examining the role Harrison's memories of foreign texts in *The School of Eloquence* have to play in this sequence of poetry. The poet's determination to read foreign works created tension in his relationship with his father:

That summer it was Ibsen, Marx and Gide.

I got one of his you-stuck-up bugger looks:

ah sometimes think you read too many books.

ah nivver 'ad much time for a good read.

(HSP, p. 141)

In these lines memories of reading books which require translation manifest the power books have to disturb personal relationships as well as recording Harrison's father's view that reading is a waste of the time he has to spare in his life. In 'Book Ends' (HSP, p. 29) Harrison explores ways of celebrating the memory of his mother. His poem is an epitaph for her and is also charged with the antagonism the poet experienced in his relationship with his father. The antagonism is generated by words and books that are between them, and in turn poses a risk to the voicing of the memory of mother/wife that they both desire:

Back in our silences and sullen looks,
for all the Scotch we drink, what's still between 's
not the thirty or so years, but books, books, books.

(HSP, p. 126)

The phrase 'book ends' is chosen with great care. At the same time as expressing the antagonism between Harrison and his father it is a living mnemonic for his mother's love for them both:

*You're like book ends, the pair of you, she'd say,
Hog that grate, say nothing, sit, sleep, stare....*

(HSP, p. 29)

The phrase unites her husband and son to her while respecting their differences; it honours her character. It is fitting therefore that her name becomes equivalent to a book end in the second sonnet of the pair. Sonnet II revolves around her name 'FLORENCE', as if she is the author of her own book. Harrison takes extraordinary risks with the authentication of his childhood memories; a skill Douglas Dunn admires when he writes:

Harrison runs the risk of narrating his own behaviour and his private thoughts; he wagers with himself and what used to be known as the Muse on their authenticity. The gesture is extreme and candid, and made possible by a refusal to surrender to reticence.^[148]

Indeed, there are many times when the poet's mature knowledge of foreign texts (Greek in particular), threaten to manipulate his recollections of the past. 'Currants' begins with a version of Proust's famed episode of recall stimulated by dipping a madeleine in his tea. The shadow of the literary foreign text undermines Harrison's attempt to recall his father solely by using words which record the ordinariness of life:

An Eccles cake's my petite madeleine!
On Sundays dad stoked up for next week's bake
and once took me along to be 'wi' t'men'.

(HSP, p. 151)

Making the 'Eccles cake[s] my *petite madeleine!*' allows Harrison to make fictional and real realms of experience rub together. Keeping Proust's refined writing of remembrance in the literary background behind 'Currants', Harrison implies his preference for the sweat and toil of his father's work. However, the amalgamation of literary (foreign) and real experience is charged with potential vicissitudes in Harrison's relationship with his father. The exclamation which begins sonnet I ('An Eccles cake's my *petite madeleine!*') makes us aware of the young Harrison's deliberately defiant efforts to think differently from lit-

erary and paternal viewpoints. 'Hunched' and watching his father's hand dipping into the currants, the poet transports himself into a world of sexual fantasy which has no complementary connection with either Proustian memory or Harrison's father who disturbs the poet's reverie:

One Eccles needs the currants you could take
in a hand imagined cupped round a girl's breast.
Between barrels of dried fruit and tubs of lard
I hunched and watched, and thought of girls undressed
and wondered what it meant when cocks got hard.
As my daydream dropped her silky underclothes,
from behind I smelt my father next to me.

(HSP, p. 151)

Harrison's dream of 'girls undressed' is self-absorbing, the young poet's desire to be different from his father manifested in a crude fantasy of sexual desire which displays Harrison's sense of isolation from refined literary experiences as well as his self-imposed alienation from his father's world. In sonnet II of 'Currants' the poet moves away from the smell of his father's workplace to a different world. There is a logic to Harrison's decision to trace the currants of the Eccles cake back to the warmer climates of Greece. Apart from the fact that Greece is where the currants came from, Harrison clearly finds great comfort in placing personal memories of childhood and his father in a Greek light and warmth:

I smell my father, wallowing in bed,
dripping salt no one will taste into his dough,
and clouds of currants spiral in my head
and like drowsy autumn insects come and go
darkening the lightening skylight and the walls.
My veins grow out of me like tough old vines
and grapes, each bunch the weight of a man's balls
picked by toiling Greeks and Levantines,
are laid out somewhere open air and warm
where there might be also women, sun, blue sky
overcast as blackened currants swarm
into my father's hard 'flies' cemetery'.

(HSP, p. 152)

Despite new environments the smell of Harrison's father's sweat haunts the poet. It is left to the poet to make something of the currants which his father would normally make into Eccles cakes. Harrison's memory of his father seems refreshed by its translation (that is, movement from one place to another) and association with images of Greece.

The currants which eventually swarm into the 'hard flies' cemetery' (a Leeds name for Eccles cakes; the word 'cemetery' suggests the cake is symbolic of his father's life) form a powerful cloud of thought. Coming as they do after Harrison's recollections of childhood, the cloud of currants spiraling in his mind is like a collection of memories. (Philip Larkin has also equated flies, plague and memory. Watching horses in 'At Grass' the poet asked 'do memories plague their ears like flies?'.^[149]) The presence of this cloud in a blue sunny landscape shows how troubling Harrison finds memory, the cloud blighting his mind like a plague. However, at the same time the sombre cloud is a mark of the poet's respect for his father's life despite being distant from him. The translation of childhood memory to Greece which occurs in sonnet II represents Harrison's conviction that Greek landscape can help him to mourn and remember his father. Elsewhere, Harrison writes about personal memories as if they are staged and dependent on the language of Greek drama; a good example occurs in the sonnet called 'The Morning After' (HSP, p. 157). The image of the 'scorched circle on the road' left by the celebratory fire for VJ Day combines the poet's private childhood memory of happiness shared by everyone in his neighbourhood at the end of the Second World War with the devastating destructiveness of the atomic bomb that brought about the defeat of Japan.

In the introduction to *The Trackers of Oxyrhincus* Harrison spells out how the circle became his 'brooding ground' within which he could help his imagination to 'cope with the twentieth century':^[150]

It was in this starless shape that I learned to relate our celebratory fire, with the white hot coals from domestic sofas, to that terrible form of fire that brought about the 'VJ' when unleashed on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. One element for celebration and terror. One space for the celebrant and sufferer.^[151]

As well as suggesting that the 'scorched circle' embraces personal, domestic and world issues, Harrison makes it clear in the prefatory introduction to *Trackers* that the circle is also the equivalent of a Greek orchestra. Any assessment of the links between elegiac memories and texts in translation in *The School of Eloquence* must pay attention to the recognisable and openly-expressed mournfulness present in the human situations described there *and* the particularly dramatic intertextual citations which create the context for these situations:

Though people weep, their tears dry from the heat.
 Faces flush with flame, beer, sheer relief
 and such a sense of celebration in our street
 for me it still means joy though banked with grief.

And that, now clouded, sense of public joy
 with war-torn adults wild in their loud fling
 has never come again since as a boy
 I saw Leeds people dance and heard them sing.

There's still that dark, scorched circle on the road.
 The morning after kids like me helped spray
 hissing upholstery spring-wire that still glowed
 and cobbles boiling with black gas-tar for VJ.

(HSP, p. 157)

Focusing on the street parties which marked the end of the war, the poet draws on the sentimentality inherent in the street celebrations and wants us to witness the fact that the memory still moves him almost to tears: 'for me it still means joy though banked with grief'. The poet's insistence on the personal relevance of the 'fire' highlights the nostalgically elegiac note in his representation of his own feelings. For the small boy who 'saw Leeds people dance and heard them sing' the circle represents moments which are irretrievable and only leave the maturer poet to reflect on 'The Morning After'.

David Constantine finds the self-regard in Harrison's poetry irritating:

Harrison is not shy of speaking in his own voice; the lyrical 'I' in his long poems is invariably the man himself. Thus in the longer reflective poems he draws the reflections directly out of personal circumstances and presents them without displacement or obliqueness. I should call him self-regarding, if the term could be used neutrally. He characterizes himself as a Northern Grammar School boy or a poet – with an intimacy you might think he would find embarrassing. He does truly think himself a fit topic for poetry. . . .

It is risky to go on exploiting intrinsically affecting material. And the true voice of feeling can be heard in other persons beside the first.^[152]

However, Tony Harrison's use of the first person singular to remember the past is much subtler and more controlled than Constantine allows. Constantine has not appreciated the carefully modulated use of the first person singular to speak with a public voice which we can clearly see by highlighting the public, dramatic and private significance of the 'scorched circle on the road'. To begin with, the intimate sentiments that Constantine finds distasteful are an important part of a populist public voice for poetry which we find in *The School of Eloquence*. Writing about *The School of Eloquence* Rick Rylance has pointed out that 'the poems are populist in cast, draw upon the sentimentality of

popular entertainment and want to make us cry'.^[153] A phrase like 'war-torn' belongs to the journalistic jargon popular at the time, 'war-torn Britain' capturing the headline of many national newspapers. Secondly, the image of the circle connects personal memory with Harrison's delight in translation. Knowing of Harrison's association of the 'scorched circle' with a Greek orchestra encourages us to see a link between past and present, which hints that Harrison's representations of childhood memories are more than nostalgic recall, that the 'public joy' he refers to is more than a populist's generalisation. To support the suggestion that intertextual citation turns the personal memory in Harrison's sonnets into public drama we need to examine more closely moments of *The Oresteia* where the poet constrains self-expression within a dramatic translation.

Indeed we could argue that the art of translation absorbs the personality of the poet. Several critics have suggested that as the constraint on personal expressiveness tightens, insight into contemporary life increases, Reuben A. Brower has written:

The average reader of translation in English wants to find the kind of experience which has become identified with poetry in his reading of English Literature. The translator who wishes to be read must in some degree satisfy this want. The conditions of translation make this almost inevitable. For the translator in seeking to preserve a kind of anonymity, in seeking to eliminate himself – to let his author speak – often finds that the voice which speaks is that of his own contemporaries.^[154]

By examining the translations which Harrison makes of moments of memory, I investigate how his dramatisations of memory in translation voice contemporary social and poetic concerns. Throughout *The School of Eloquence* childhood memory is contained within a limited range of experience: Leeds, the sonnet form, local neighbourhood (the 'scorched circle' is part of the poet's attempt to suggest boundaries to his experiences). It is clear from Harrison's letters to Peter Hall that by translating *The Oresteia* Harrison was deliberately constraining his self-expression within a dramatic field of action (symbolised by the Greek orchestra) and fulfilling the function of the artist as described by Stravinsky (and quoted approvingly by Harrison in his correspondence with Peter Hall):

My freedom thus consists in my moving about within the narrow frame that I have assigned myself for each one of my undertakings. I shall go even further: my freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I narrow my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles. *Whatever diminishes constraint, diminishes strength.* The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one's self of the chains that shackle the spirit.^[155]

The links between elegy and translation are not diminished by a tempering of memory's dramatic potential. Translation is, after all, an act in respect of a dead author, and intended to prolong the memory of the original author. There are poets who distrust

translation's ability to respect the dead, but Harrison and Dunn are not amongst them. Nabokov suggests that translation is 'profanation of the dead'.^[156] Despite the serious doubts about translation's ability to remember the dead authentically, it is an art which tries to work with obstacles. Attempting to surmount the difficulty of putting a foreign language into one's native tongue is an invaluable lesson for poets as sensitive to obstacles and class barriers as Dunn and Harrison. The idea that the recapturing and dramatisation of an original author's intentions may provide central perspectives on the connections between translation and 'a public voice for poetry' has been expressed by many critics. Recently Clive Wilmer, reviewing C. H. Sisson's translation of Racine's *Phèdre*, suggested a link between translation and an impersonal analysis of contemporary issues:

The translator who gives himself to the preoccupations that as a modern man he shares with his ancient author is more likely to conjure up at least part of his author's spirit.^[157]

When Harrison claims to want a 'public voice for poetry' ('You have to work with what you've got if you want to develop a public voice for poetry. I am interested in how you speak publicly as a poet'^[158]), this does not mean that he is ready to abandon the private and confessional. Harrison develops a public voice for poetry by referring to his own past reading of major and established texts, many of which were translations.

In the sonnet which opens *The School of Eloquence* Harrison makes clear links between reading personal memories as political comment, and translation:

Read and committed to the flames, I call
these sixteen lines that go back to my roots
my *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*,
my growing black enough to fit my boots.

(HSP, p. 112)

The 'I call' of the first person singular makes us feel that the poem has already been written and that the poet is now summoning the lines from the dead, from another time. Harrison's memory of childhood is an essential ingredient of 'On Not Being Milton', and yet the poet also seems committed to burning his own untranslated autobiography. At the same time the title of his autobiography is the same as the celebrated poem by the Martiniquan writer Aimé Césaire 'which exuberantly celebrates anti-colonial resistance, black belonging and relatedness and the release of sexuality from its savage regulation under slavery'.^[159] Throwing the book into the fire means that all significance is reduced to the same ashes. Having 'read' his book before consigning it to the flames Harrison suggests that the ingredients of poetry are rooted in remembered autobiography rather than factual autobiography. In attempting to make sense of these puzzling opening lines

Rylance suggests a meaning: 'I have read (been educated) and committed this older culture, like coal, to the flames, but am now returning.'^[160] By using the untranslated title of Césaire's poem Harrison manages to dispel contextual restrictions, inviting several different literary and social contexts. The untranslated French which we read in the opening sonnet in *The School of Eloquence* shows a poet assessing his personal juvenile revolt against his background with another poet's public (used here to indicate political awareness) manifestation that the roots of revolt reside in the imposition of language (French) on an African state. Commenting on Milton's poems of 1645 where English, Latin and Italian rubbed shoulders, George Steiner suggested that translation was an art which whilst sustaining harmony between the past and present could register antagonisms, too:

Translation establishes a logic of relationship between past and present, between different tongues and traditions which were splitting apart under stress of nationalism and religious conflict.^[161]

Harrison's interest in the tricks memory can play and translation's special aptitude for highlighting unlikely connections is clearly apparent in 'Travesties' (HSP, p. 30), the third poem in a series of five under the title 'The White Queen'. Although the sequence is set in Africa, Harrison's broad knowledge of Greek and European literature is never far away. As the title 'Travesties' suggests, Harrison is perfectly aware of the ludicrousness of trying to approach African culture through Western perspectives (travesty meaning burlesque as well as disguise). Rosemary Burton points out the ludicrousness of colonialism and suggests links between Harrison's feelings as an outsider at school and in Africa:

Rather than offering liberation from the class structure of his home, Africa presented powerful reminders of his own feelings as an outsider at school. Just as he had been expected to lose his accent and conform, so conformity was expected of Africans and colonialism was enforced to the point of being ludicrous.^[162]

'Distant Ophir' (after Hieronymi Frascastorii, *Syphilis, sive Morbus Gallicus*, Veronae MDXXX) masquerades as a translation (using several dramatic devices of Greek tragedy) and elegy, referring to Hieronymus Frascastorius' popular sixteenth-century poem *Syphilis*. The voice which speaks with authority has the ability to move between times, places and literatures, and takes full advantage of the drama of the situation.

In a footnote Harrison declares himself interested in the silence that Hieronymus lived with. 'Note Hieronymus Frascastorius (1483-1553), the author of *Syphilis*, was born, as perhaps befits a true poet, without a mouth. The fact is celebrated in the well known epigram of Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558). Frascastorius died, after an apoplexy,

speechless.' At the heart of Harrison's poetry is his conviction that all those who have been silenced by history, or are silent, have truths to communicate. He is drawn to combine elegy with translation because they are both arts which attempt to break the silences imposed by death and oblivion which shroud the past. By breaking silence in 'Travesties' the poet aims to maintain an awareness of 'human extinction . . . present in our imaginations'. Once this awareness is present 'we bear in our memory the responsibility for the future':^[163]

'Westerners who laid the Sun's fowl low,
the flocks of Apollo, now stand and hear
the dreadful sufferings you must undergo....

You'll go on looking, losing more and more
to the sea, the climate, weapons, ours and yours,
your crimes abroad brought home as civil war.'

(HSP, p. 29)

Instead of being a celebration of conquest (and Harrison could easily have equated translation with the delight in reaching the realms of gold as Keats had done in 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'), Harrison equates translation with the malicious imposition of Western greed. Harrison's poem also works on the level of a historical drama, brilliantly capturing the fear about contagious diseases which was rife in the sixteenth century and which is being revived by the advent of Aids in the twentieth century:

'And also *Syphilis*: sores, foul sores
will drive you back through storm and calenture
crawling like lepers to our peaceful shores.

The malaise of the West will lure
the scapegoats of its ills, you and your crew,
back to our jungles looking for a cure, –

You'll only find the Old World in the New,
and you'll rue your *discubrimiento*, rue
it, rue Africa, rue Cuba, rue Peru!

And away behind the crags the dark bird flew.

And everything it prophesied came true.

(HSP, p. 30)

Harrison's reference to 'lepers' draws on the medical ignorance rife at the time of Discovery. Erasmus of Rotterdam writing in 1523 makes one of his characters say in a dialogue in *Colloquia*:

Nothing appears to me more dangerous as that so many people breathe the same warm air

... there are many who suffer from hidden diseases, and there is no disease which is not contagious. Surely many have the Spanish or (as it is often called) the French pox, although it appears among all nations. These people present a threat which in my opinion is not smaller than that from lepers.^[164]

Like air translation can touch many areas of experience. Equating translation and disease (as do Harrison and Erasmus) enforces the idea that whilst there is a logic between the past and present this is a dangerous continuation to take for granted (The Old Testament style warning which opens the poem forecasts that the sins of the fathers will be visited on their progeny).

Translation of Greek drama has allowed Harrison to argue that 'form in poetry is like the mask which enables you to go beyond the scream as a reaction to events that in the normal course of life would make you do just that'.^[165] There are several masks (or subjects) at work in 'Travesties'. The italicising of '*Syphilis*' refers to the sixteenth-century book Harrison claims to be making a version of and to the disease introduced to colonies by the first Western explorers. Although a poem like 'Travesties' is in part a dramatisation of universal issues rather than personal crises, Harrison does not lose the sombre and intensely elegiac mood which characterises the memories throughout *The School of Eloquence*. Indeed, Harrison's preoccupations with certain aspects of Greek drama including his translation of death, destruction and darkness in *The Agamemnon* informs the development of a public voice for poetry which values the dramatic quality of memory highly. There is a moment in *The Agamemnon* when the herald remembers the most traumatic time of his life, when he thought he was about to die. Even facing the memory of his possible death his language grasps at wider universalities and his voice expounds public grief. He uses his critical faculties (evident here in the way he makes up his points, gives examples and similes) to assess what happened. His voice allows him to stand back from the passion of his personality and register events and evidence in order to come to a reasoned conclusion about a situation:

Blackness. Waveforce. Sea heaving and swelling.
Fierce thrashing galesqualls whistling from Thrace,
hurricanes blasting, rain lashing and pelting,
ship-prow smashing ship-prow, horned beast goring beast,
beasts with their horns locked butting each other.
You know when a collie not used to its charges
scatters the daft sheep every direction,
colliding, collapsing, that kind of chaos...
well that's how the waves were. Next morning
the Aegean had mushroomed with corpses and shipwreck.

Our ship though, amazing, still whole and undamaged.
 Some god interceded, got our ship pardon.
 Our helm had been guided by the hand of some he-god.
 Our ship was the one that didn't get shattered.
 Couldn't believe it, escaping that wave-grave,
 couldn't believe our life lot so lucky.^[166]

The herald uses objects and nature to describe the shipwreck. His style prevents memory from being introspective and self-centred, since it makes memory represent the experience of the whole crew on the ship. The herald's memory revolves around two motifs (heavy sea, a collie dog on a mountain side). It becomes a record of a destructive moment, ruthless in its implications for those at home on the shore. The verbs allow no room for respite until we come to the 'next morning'. At this moment it becomes clear that Harrison's translation of the herald's experience is meant to reflect more than Greek life and that 'the voice which speaks is that of his own contemporaries'.^[167] The contemporary image mushrooming at the centre of the speech is a brilliant move. It implies that we live in a time haunted by recent destruction, the mushroom imitating the nuclear cloud above Hiroshima.

* * *

Tony Harrison produces works of translation simultaneously with works of poetry. Douglas Dunn however only focuses on the art of translation after writing *Elegies*. The verb 'translate' recurs in *Northlight* and marks the poet's attempt to participate in less visual realms of creation. The suggestion that Dunn was preoccupied with coping with the pain of personal bereavement and therefore unable to consider publicly dramatic expressions of loss is suggested in a sensitive review of *Elegies* by J. P. Ward. Ward argues that the poems exhibit the necessity for a skillful control of 'the overwhelming impact of the bereavement' before 'any contemplation of wider universalities can be considered'. Dunn approaches 'wider universalities' by way of emotional directness because he wants to affirm the power of love to combat intense suffering:

Any contemplation of wider universalities cannot be considered until the overwhelming impact of the bereavement itself has been coped with. Dunn expresses this in some poems near the start in which incidents leading up to his wife's illness, decline, death and funeral are dealt with as directly as art and grief allow. There is a formality, a stateliness in this writing in which the strength of the poet's love is paradoxically all the more powerfully declaimed; paradoxically that is, for us in the twentieth century who too often think that emotion must be sprayed as with a fire hose on all parts of the crowd in all directions. The wonder of these poems is that

the means by which the grief is incessantly held down, is also the celebration of what, evidently, the poet and his wife shared.^[168]

In *Elegies* Ward finds a beautiful example of the way that deliberately controlled emotion can lead to 'contemplation of wider universalities'. Dunn's awareness of translation (the movement between countries and realms of experience) helps us to appreciate the elusiveness of the outside world which Dunn makes reference to in *Elegies*.

The epitaph which appears on the page dedicating *Elegies* to Lesley Dunn is an expression of love in Italian. Dunn does not offer us an English version. The untranslated Italian raises the issue of whether or not we can know of things only imperfectly understood:

In memoriam
LESLEY BALFOUR DUNN
1944–1981

Salute, o genti humane affaticate!
Tutto trapassa e nulla può morir.
Noi troppo odiammo e sofferimmo. Amate.
Il mondo è bello e santo è l'avvenir.

Carducci

(E, p. 5)

The reader might guess that the Italian mentions death and love but it is perhaps a surprise to find that the love concerned is an exhortation for humankind to love one another rather than that of a husband to his wife:

Salute, weary mankind!
Everything fades and nothing can die.
We hated and we suffered too much. Love each other.
The world is beautiful and holy is the future.^[169]

By inviting a translation of his wife's epitaph (epitaphs are the most public ways of communicating memory) Dunn indicates that he wishes his reader to see this moment as publicly significant. The epitaph seems to offer knowledge spoken by Lesley from beyond the grave. Paul Mariani has suggested that the 'essential act of the translator' is to pass between realms of the living and dead: 'Remember that what Aeneas will undertake is itself an act of translation.'^[170] (Mariani is referring to Aeneas' visit to the underworld.) Carducci's lines prove a mediating text, one which suggests that Dunn may be reaching for a sublime space in his poetry to achieve communication with the dead. The Italian epitaph also alerts us to the public display of loving feeling that is an inevitable part of Dunn's remembrance of his wife. Rather than offering the reader a direct translation,

Dunn allows the whole volume of *Elegies* to suggest the meaning of the dedication and by using Italian to summarise the life of his Scottish wife Dunn implies that he wishes to slip between countries and languages. Many of the poems in *Elegies* make reference to France and the French language.

Every poet has in mind his or her imaginative landscape before attempting to create a landscape within a poem. Collaborating with Charles Tomlinson in the preparation of translations for *The Oxford Book of Verse in English Translation*, Henry Gifford gave a working definition of the word 'translation' which Tomlinson quotes in the introduction he wrote for the collection:

Every real poem starts from a given ground and carries the reader to an unforeseen vantage point whence he views differently the landscape over which he has passed. What the translator must do is to recognise these two terminal points, and to connect them by a coherent flight. This will not be exactly the flight of the original, but no essential reach of the journey will have been left out. Translation is resurrection, but not of the body.^[171]

In many of the instances when Dunn addresses his wife he considers placing her memory in a sublime context but he refuses to occupy a twilight scene. There is a legacy of poetry in which writers summon the authoritative presence of dead writers. Shelley conjures up Rousseau, Eliot speaks to Yeats. In 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands' Dunn makes no attempt to conjure up Pascal's voice. The act of reading a book in French makes the poet a stranger to the father of a boy dying of leukemia. Dunn focuses on the way in which reading a foreign language relieves a burden of feeling and translates bad fortune (similar to that suffered by the father of the ill boy) into a 'mystic' experience:

I close my book, the *Pensées* of Pascal.
I am light with meditation, religiose
And mystic with a day of solitude.
I do not tell him of my own sorrows.
He is bored with misery and premonition.
He has seen the limits of time, asking 'Why?'
Nature is silent on that question.

(E, p. 45)

The scene takes place in a public park and I would suggest that this indicates to the reader that Dunn wishes to discuss the role which emotional expressions of feeling have to play in a public environment. His communion with his text emphasises that all poets are by nature exiles:

He sees my book, and then he looks at me,
 Knowing me for a stranger. I have said
 I am sorry. What more is there to say?

(E, p. 46)

The phrases and cadences in the fourth stanza which I have quoted above are emotionally some of the most overtly restrictive in *Elegies* and make us aware of the gross inadequacies implied by a line like 'I have said / I am sorry. What more is there to say?'. 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands' shows a poet scaling down a personal commitment to his fellow human beings. Unresponsive to the father, 'his smile falls at my feet, on the baked earth / Shoes have shuffled over and ungrassed', Dunn craves a distance which will give him an 'undramatic' social panorama:

He is called over to the riverbank.
 I go away, leaving the Park, walking through
 The Golf Course, and then a wood, climbing,
 And then bracken and gorse, sheep pasturage.
 From a panoptic hill I look down on
 A little town, its estuary, its bridge,
 Its houses, churches, its undramatic streets.

(E, p. 46)

Dunn's 'look down' also marks a transformation in perspective. Originally, reading Pascal assuages grief and gives introspective spiritual understanding: 'I am light with meditation, religiose / And mystic with a day of solitude.' The poet seems to walk away from this moment as well as away from the father, and as he looks 'from a panoptic hill' achieves a vision which offers a prospect of 'wider universalities'. 'Reading Pascal in the Lowlands' shows us how smoothly the perspective of 'I' can be translated from egocentric reflection to a broader consideration of a poet's relationship with the landscape.

In *Northlight* the verb 'translate' is used to link different places:

Hudson, Tiber, Seine and the Missouri
 Exist in somewhere else's history,
 While metaphoric winds'
 Dramatic light
 Translates imagination's second-sight
 Into a figured absolute
 Somewhere beyond perception.

(NL, p. 66)

Rather than making the word signify a process of restating the meaning of a foreign lan-

guage Dunn uses the verb to restate the significance of real places. The verb 'translates' emphasises Dunn's interest in mapping out realms of experience 'somewhere beyond perception', but there is a mournfulness in the word 'somewhere' too, the fact that the poet seems unable to identify any specific place suggesting a roving restless imagination. Carol Rumens has suggested the disorientation inherent in being aware of different realms of language. Listening to Russian Rumens found 'sometimes I feel as if I have no language at all, that my country is called Nowhere'.^[172] Translation literally means moving from one place to another and in the poet's refusal to be more specific about place than 'somewhere' we can read a lament for his technical inability to reach some realms of experience with words. In *Elegies* the heart and eye are the two places where experience comes to rest. Wherever Dunn's 'I'/'eye' saw, or cried, the action involves looking into his heart:

Best friend and love, my true contemporary,
She taught me how to live, then how to die,
And I curate her dreams and gallery.
Writing with light, the heart within my eye
Shines on my grief; my true contemporary.

(E, p. 23)

In this stanza it is clear that Dunn realises the importance of coping with 'the overwhelming impact of the bereavement' before his eye can cope with 'wider universalities'.^[173] By the time the poet comes to write *Northlight* he can view the heart outside himself.

'75°' is a poem stimulated by the late transfer to Scotland of signs of summer (the birds) from the south. There are many landscapes in Dunn's poetry but he has several favoured ways of presenting them:

IV

The heart stays out all night. Each house
A variant of moonlit slates
And flightpaths of the flittermouse,
Sleeps in the dream it illustrates
Translating garden laureates
Into unlettered alphabets,

Holding antiquity and now
 Within the same nocturnal vow –
Internal wonders in that pale
Hour after sunset when you hear
A visionary nightingale
Articulate your life's frontier.

(NL, p. 19)

The reference to both 'heart' and '*visionary nightingale*' is an updated version of the mournful visionariness created by Keats in 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Following the flightpath of the visionary bird, Keats hears the 'plaintive' and melancholy tones of the nightingale diffuse into the environment:

Adieu! adieu! Thy plaintive anthem fades
 Past the near meadows over the still stream,
 Up the hillside; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the valley glades:
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
 Fled is that music. . . Do I wake or sleep?^[174]

Whereas Keats' references to landscape emphasise the dominance of visible reality over the reality of the visionary, Dunn dares to affirm that '*A visionary nightingale* [can] / *Articulate your life's frontier.*' Indeed, 'garden laureates' ('laureate' reminds us that the gardens have become the subject of poetry) translate the past ('antiquity') 'into unlettered alphabets', where the juxtaposition of 'unlettered' and 'alphabets' confirms the possibility of articulation whilst denying it. As we have seen Dunn's eye and heart translate between beautiful states of being. In *Elegies* and *Northlight* the beauty is an important motivating factor in his creativity, yet Dunn can respond equally to less attractive scenes.

'Poor People's Café' (Dunn's most recent poem), published with a prose piece criticising the Poll Tax, in *Poll Tax: The Fiscal Fake*, is intended to remind the reader about the forgotten poor:

Not down and out,
 Though some come close,
 Nor layabouts
 Trading pathos
 For tea and bread,
 But simply poor. . . .^[175]

Dunn intends his short verse lines, which placard his simple observations, to worm their way into the reader's consciousness. The elusiveness of the 'I' (which hasn't yet appeared), means that we are all (poet and reader) implicated in the crime of forgetting the poor.

The absence of 'I' is distressing, since it leaves us with a series of mnemonic phrases – 'layabout', 'down and out' – which seem to have no connection with any individual or the poet's opinion. When the 'I' appears the poet cannot see properly:

Steamed spectacles
As I sit down
At the wiped spills,
Raising the tone
(Or so it seems)
Against their will...

Such rooms translate
Half-lies in how
Waitresses wait
On out-at-elbow
Customers by
Puddled sills, drips
From windows. Pie,
Baked beans and chips;
Tea, sausage, roll...
That smell of coat;
Dried rain, and a scowl
From a dead thought.^[176]

Associating the verb 'translate' with rooms identifies the spaces the poet is interested in comparing. There is a clear difference between rooms intended to house waitresses and the use made of them by 'out-at-elbow / Customers'. However, Dunn's more frequent references to translation have been to emphasise lyric sweetness. Indeed, his recent position is not dissimilar to that of the exiled Duke in *As You Like It*:

Happy is your Grace
That can translate the stubbornness of fortune
Into so quiet and so sweet a style.^[177]

At the same time that Dunn was publishing 'Poor People's Café' he had completed a remarkably lyrical translation of Racine's *Andromache*. It is a particularly interesting choice in the light of a discussion of the links between elegy and translation, and the use of memory made by elegy and translation, since the main character is a woman whose influence over the other characters in the play depends on her absence from the action. This provides an interesting parallel link with Dunn's treatment of the absence of his wife in *Elegies*. Like Andromache, Lesley Dunn is 'more conspicuous by her absence than by her presence', and her absence is highly influential:

Andromache is responsible for the actions of the other characters. She is the pivotal figure in the

action and the character who, although absent from the action, obliges the other characters to act in certain ways even when they think they are acting independently. . . . It is Andromache's past which is the determinant of her actions in the present, and consequently of the reactions of all the other protagonists, initially and most directly of Pyrrhus.^[178]

Throughout *Elegies* the poet makes the memory of his wife so vital that the reader feels she is still an active influence and her past the determinant of an awareness of living a 'good' life. The memories associated with the woman we see in *Andromache* are not focused on a 'good life' but on the fate of Hector and the outcome of the Trojan War. Sharing Racine's imaginings of the memories lived out by Andromache and other second-generation Greeks and Trojans, Dunn chooses to play down the dramatic quality of Racine's play using lyricism to give access to Racine's thematic intentions.

Dunn makes no attempt to recreate the exact symmetry of Racine's alexandrines. Instead he emphasises the lyricism of his own verse and rhymes. The following lines from Racine are beautifully concise in the way that they summon up, and summarise, the gulf of national and personal history which prevents Andromache loving Pyrrhus:

Elle est Veuve d'Hector. Et je suis fils d'Achile.
Trop de haine separe Andromache et Pyrrhe.^[179]

At first Dunn's equivalent seems unexciting and disappointingly long winded:

She's Hector's widow, I'm Achilles' son,
Oh, she and Pyrrhus never can be one.
There's too much hate between us.^[180]

Dunn's version seems to drain Racine's lines of their energy. In an effort to be lyrical he constantly adds extra lines throughout the play. This seems unnecessary until we realise why it is so important for Dunn to work the word 'one' into this couplet. The couplet expresses the union between historical and personal memory crucial to an understanding of the relationships of the play. Earlier when Andromache and Pyrrhus had been discussing the fate of her son and Pyrrhus threatened the boy's death, Andromache replied:

I lengthened life for him; I put off death.
Now shall I follow by his fated path
To his father. We shall be three, not two,
Made so by one, my lord – made three by you.^[181]

The word 'one' indicates the distance between herself and Pyrrhus. It isolates Pyrrhus from Andromache's past Trojan existence, and it isolates him from the hoped-for physical union his use of the word had expressed earlier. What seemed a weakness proves to be part of a lyrical design which explores the way a past can bar the possibilities of loving union

and offer solitary bitterness instead. The lucidity of Dunn's lyricism makes classical myth accessible by equating it with everyday actions and emotions; these are not characters who are given obviously nobler passions than our own. In his essay 'Lyricism in Contemporary Poetry', Dunn argues:

Lyricism is drawn from the ability to engage with the materials of everyday life, and then absorb them, not necessarily to transcend them, or adjust ordinariness to the mysterious or irrational; instead although very different from each other in convictions, background and styles, and in nationality, they prove that poetry begins in reality as well as the imagination that apprehends it.^[182]

His conviction that lyricism has the power to overcome obstacles such as differing national identities explains why so many of Racine's dramatic gestures are translated into a less assertive style. In *Andromache's* most famous evocation of memory Dunn makes his mythological character appeal to 'what we've lived through' before moving, by way of memory, into a more imaginative vein:

Cephisa, don't forget what we've lived through –
That night of infamy, oblivion for
Troy and the Trojan people ever more!
Imagine Pyrrhus, and then realize
How I first saw him with gleaming eyes
Assault our burning palaces and slay
My seven brothers as he hacked his way
Through carnage he enjoyed, urging the Greeks
To slaughter more of us.^[183]

Andromache's exhortation to her nurse to battle with forgetfulness is the struggle of a woman's memory against a destructive and eliminating power. Her memory preserves the cruel intensity of the power Pyrrhus showed towards her relatives with violent verbs: 'assault', 'slay', 'hacked'. Dunn has succeeded in translating Racine's lines into a believable lament for an abuse of power. The attempt to make myth overtly real is a deliberate move to erase the line between fiction and reality and let an uncomplicated lyricism grow (the rhymes of the piece are especially simple, 'for'/'more', 'realize'/'eyes', 'slay'/'way'). Dunn draws attention to details of the slaughter of the family and as a result we feel that *Andromache* has personally witnessed what she describes. Dunn's translation of *Andromache's* anguished voicing of the past gives limited access to Racine's original, which emphasised the spectacle and chivalry of the original myth. For example, Dunn's version plays down the dishonour afforded to Hector's bones, and the bloodiness of the spectacle conveyed by Racine's nouns and replaces this instead with a less dramatic speech. A more literal translation of Racine's French reads:

Must I forget, as he can no longer remember?
 Must I forget Hector deprived of funeral rites,
 And dragged without honour around our walls?
 Must I forget his father crumpled at my feet,
 Covering in blood the altar he embraced?
 Think, think, Cephise, of that cruel Night –
 Which was for the whole population an eternal night.
 Picture Pyrrhus his eyes sparkling,
 Entering our burning Palace by the burning light;
 Making a passage on all my brothers' deaths,
 And completely covered with blood firing up the carnage.^[184]

In the act of translation Dunn has decided to exchange Racine's bloody delight in Pyrrhus' martial prowess for a gentler portrayal of fortune's adversity. Dunn does not want his classical figures to seem superhuman or to make war remotely attractive. The speech of memory Dunn writes for Andromache also respects a woman's voice and lived experience. For example, Andromache appeals to the audience to 'realize / How I first saw him with his gleaming eyes'. Compared with Racine's original, the speech Dunn devises for Andromache can seem dramatically weak and his awareness of the myth behind the drama poor. Yet he deliberately plays down the classical tradition, finding it obscures and distorts Andromache's real feelings. Dunn makes Pyrrhus sensitive enough to realise that more than patriotism prevents her loving him:

A patriotic mystery obscures
 Your heart.^[185]

Dunn's translation of *Andromache* maintains an awareness of the importance of the female perspective he first explored in *Elegies*. He uses a woman's memory to emphasise that war and cruelty cannot be forgotten and overcome by love, but also to suggest that by adopting Andromache's view of war we may see the absurdities of war. The way one remembers can reflect the way one views life and intends to live as Dunn has already shown in *Elegies*. In the case of a translator, the manner in which one chooses to change or develop an author reflects what the poet values most about his or her art. With this in mind it is interesting to turn to Craig Raine's version of Racine's *Andromache*, and in particular the same speech of remembrance.

Raine not only rewrites the history Racine interprets, he also rewrites English history. Raine imagines that London (the equivalent of Troy) has been rased to the ground by the Nazis, and that the heirs to the English throne, Annette Le Skye (Andromache) and her son are in Vittorio's (Pyrrhus') hands. Annette LeSkye is well aware of the recognition her own position merits. She says to Vittorio who is a mythic equivalent of Mussolini:

You said you'd see Rome itself undone for me.
You said you'd rewrite history.^[186]

The power Annette Le Skye responds to in Vittorio is the power to bestow fame and change historical facts unscrupulously. The fact that Raine is prepared to adopt the same tactics as the dictator when he rewrites the history of England is disturbing to the reader since it implies the artist is a dictator and manipulator. This implication affects the role of memory in the play; we feel that every character is ruled by fear not love. Raine writes a version of Andromache's speech which shows that her memory is full of fear. Even Annette LeSkye's ability to lament loss is curtailed by the dictator: 'What would only make us sad / He knows already'.^[187] Annette LeSkye's insecure feelings are part of her tragic fall. 'Reduced' from fortune, part of a slow process of her family's elimination, 'slowly sinking into insignificance', she belongs to a set of names, not a set of meaningful acts, 'Othello. Elgar. Me.':

What else is there to add?
A deposition? A recital of my wrongs?
Kate, what would only make us sad,
He knows already. He brought it all about.
I am reduced as you can see,
In every circumstance. Pomp and circumstance.
A phrase. Othello. Elgar. Me.
Slowly sinking into insignificance.
I saw my father's fatal stroke.
Relatives were led out to the kitchen garden.
In the rain. I saw the soldiers soak
The walls and the rugs and the books in petrol.
And things evaporated blurred.
Then they threw in a lighted lighter. It purred.
Going through the air it purred.
And then the whole house gasped like a gas oven.^[188]

Raine makes Annette remember in order to prefigure her mental breakdown. Combining a childish lyricism (she speaks in simple rhymes 'add'/'sad', 'see'/'me') with the fragments of many stories and histories, truth and reality become confused. None of these fictional or historical events happened in the context they are given, and this undermines our sense of historical truth. It is also unlikely that Annette LeSkye saw these events in the context they are given. Her responses are confused by events which come to mind at the same time; music from Elgar, the horrors of 'gas ovens' (perhaps overheard). The strong union between historical and personal memory which Dunn achieved through a lyricism which dealt with myth as if it were reality is undermined in Raine's version of

Andromache's speech about the memory of Troy's destruction. In Raine's hands this speech focuses on an individual's breakdown. In it memory seems unreliable, and lament an activity which would only weaken the prisoners. The memory of Andromache that we respond to in Dunn's translation, is positive in the way in which it weakens our admiration for martial prowess and offers a woman's perspective of the events of war. Dunn's Andromache manages to express her memories in lyricism which unites historical and personal memory, and prevents a charge of hymning herself to the detriment of her family and their history. Dunn achieves this because he treats mythological events as if they have really been 'lived through'.

Studying the links between Dunn's use of memory in elegy and translation shows us how important it is to identify exactly what a poet is trying to communicate through style. It is easy to dismiss his version of Racine's *Andromache* as many critics did without considering the valuable contribution it can make to any debate on the development of a public voice for contemporary poetry. In an essay on lyricism in contemporary poetry Dunn wrote that 'style in poetry is intelligence – which is why we don't see too much of it, it is intelligence visible and audible'.^[189] His version of *Andromache* sacrifices the dramatic warring content of Racine's use of memory and replaces it with a muted lyricism which aims to communicate a woman's perspective of the past in historical and personal terms. Dunn's tendency to expand Racine's original text shows his eagerness to communicate, and his positive use of memory in an elegiac situation supports this eagerness. Nuclear war, historical injustices and unemployment such as we witnessed in Harrison's poetry have not featured prominently in the memory we have discovered in Dunn's later poetry. In the next chapter I turn to Dunn's earlier poetry where his engagement with social art is obvious, and discuss how the styles we read there teach Dunn the value of memory in elegy.

Chapter 4

Reflections on Reality

In order to understand how significant 'the materials of his own life [are] for his narrative and concerns'^[190] (a comment Dunn made about Larkin but relevant to his own poetry), this chapter examines the process of reflection exercised by the poet in *Terry Street*. Dunn's engagement with a confessional style begins with the writing of *Terry Street* and the acknowledged influence of Philip Larkin:

All Larkin knew of that side of Hull's life was what he felt on his eyes, but those lines in 'Here', and perhaps his poem 'Afternoons', contributed to my own attempts to explore the effect that living in Terry Street had on me, at times I hope at a level deeper than observation. As an outsider, observation, however, was as much as I could expect of myself in depicting the other people who lived there; it was probably Larkin's influence that convinced me that my poems of the time should take the form of testimony and, where I could manage it, of objective realism, if that is ever possible.^[191]

Assessing Larkin's poetic responses to areas in Hull as run down as Terry Street, Dunn emphasises the watching, feeling and sincere role that he admired in Larkin's work. Indeed, at a later point in his essay 'Under The Influence' Dunn declared that it was the sincere 'emotional realism' which he found in Larkin's verse which encouraged him to write his own: 'It obliged a reader immersed in it to toughen up notions of sincerity and honesty.'^[192] Dunn's working of poetry to effect a reflective mind which is thoughtfully aware of its social isolation is also something the poet has learned from Larkin's treatment of ordinary lived experience. 'The thoughtfulness underlying Larkin's disclosures was a good habit to begin learning and taking to heart at a time when much fashionable verse was expounding the virtues of spontaneity, or at the other extreme a calculated, almost academic modernism.'^[193]

In 'At Grass' Larkin picks out the details of a scene from a watchful isolated position. 'The eye can hardly pick them out / From the cold shade they shelter in.'^[194] The difficulty with which Larkin sees the horses is equated with the difficulty of remembering and reflective thinking. Words like 'perhaps', 'faint' and 'faded' both recreate the haziness of hot afternoons (past and present) and imply the poet's uncertainty about the accuracy of memory:

Yet fifteen years ago, perhaps
Two dozen distances sufficed
To fable them: faint afternoons
Of Cups and Stakes and Handicaps,
Whereby their names were artified
To inlay faded, classic Junes —^[196]

The verbs 'sufficed' and 'artified' embody the frightening and chastening thought that glory and narrative (the word 'fable' makes the connection with writing) which seem so easily gained ('sufficed' is not a demanding word) fade quickly. The poem in which Dunn echoes Larkin's subject is 'Horses in a Suburban Field' (TS, p. 43). Whereas Larkin enjoyed drawing on the pastoral and sporting idea of the English scene, Dunn watches horses in 'a towny field'. His horses are social creatures of suburbia which inhabit a dust-covered environment, remote from the pastoral:

Sad and captured in a towny field,
The horses peep through the light,
Step over the tin cans, a bicycle frame.
They stand under a dried-up hawthorn
With dust on its leaves, smell distant kitchens.
Then they wander through the dust,
The dead dreams of housewives.

(TS, p. 43)

In this poem the watchful poet points out the inevitability of decay; the horses are used to stepping over 'the tin cans, a bicycle frame', and wander through the 'dust' (so often associated with death). The word 'dust' could so easily have been a cliché in Dunn's poem. However, the poet uses 'dust' literally at first and then figuratively. The details which Dunn records implies a poet whose vision cannot help but notice the less attractive elements of an environment. The kitchens may be 'distant' but the horses and the poet can 'smell' them. Assessing Larkin's vision of Hull Dunn wrote that '*all* Larkin knew of that side of Hull's life was what he felt on his eyes'. The word 'all' implies that although Larkin's vision was a feeling one it lacked knowledge. Since Dunn spent most of his early poetic life in Terry Street learning his craft, it is reasonable to suggest that we will witness the originality of his own vision in *Terry Street* as well as evidence of Larkin's influence.

The word 'testimony',^[196] used by Dunn to describe his poems of that time in Hull, suggests that he feels obliged (as if under oath) to describe what he has witnessed authentically:

This time they see me at my window, among books,
A specimen under glass, being protected,
And laugh at me watching them.

(TS, p. 29)

The poet as 'specimen' is likely to have considered that his poetry offers specimen records of life in Terry Street. Dunn exhibits a reflective mind which selects specimen samples 'to explore the effects that living in Terry Street had on me, at times, I hope at a deeper level than observation'.^[197] Additionally, studying reflection can give us insight into the development of a poet's elegiac art, a point Coleridge recognised when he argued that elegy was the form of poetry 'natural to a reflective mind'.^[198] Dunn's favoured way of presenting the life in Terry Street is by an intense (and sometimes prolonged) focus on a fleeting moment, and in this he echoes one of the aphorisms which Coleridge suggested as an aid for reflection:

There is one sure way of giving freshness and importance to the most commonplace maxims — that of reflecting on them in direct reference to our own state and conduct, to our own past and future being.^[199]

Coleridge's emphasis on the fact that reflection is a process which can focus on the 'commonplace' to manifest the writer's self-conscious relationship with others in society has clear parallels in Dunn's poetry. A poem like 'After Closing Time' is a typical example of Dunn's specimen-collecting art:

Here they come, the agents of rot,
The street tarts and their celebrating trawlermen,
Singing or smoking, carrying bottles,
In a staggered group ten minutes before snow.

(TS, p. 26)

By waiting and watching for men and women coming home late from the pub Dunn is imitating both the way many elegies 'seem to "begin again", or to commence with a "yet once more"',^[200] and the reflective watching of the solitary poet found in the elegiac work of several Romantic poets. The latter is remarked upon by Geoffrey Hartman who writes:

The reflective stopping of the poet, which is like the shock of self-consciousness and may express it in a mild and already distanced form, is a general feature of Romantic lyricism and related to its pensive or white melancholy. . . a meditative slowing of time – a real deepening of mind time or self-consciousness – is always present and often sharply announced, as in the first strong beats of 'My heart aches' (Keats) or the absoluteness of 'A sudden blow. . .' (Yeats).^[201]

In 'After Closing Time' 'mind time or self-consciousness' arises from Dunn's considerations of the unsalubrious 'street tarts and their celebrating trawlermen'. The consciousness

he achieves is the consciousness of social decay, the revelling figures being 'agents of rot.' The revellers also give rise to a reflection on death, the phrase 'ten minutes before snow' anticipating death in its hint that all traces of life will be obliterated from sight at snow fall. The competent compactness of poems like 'After Closing Time' suggests that Dunn has gained integrity and functional completeness from what remains nevertheless a testifying self. However, exercising his reflective mind on Terry Street generates emotions in the solitary poet which stultify as well as stimulate creativity. Dunn often finds the 'testimony' of his experiences in Terry Street painful: in 'Men of Terry Street' he writes 'It hurts to see their faces, too sad or too jovial' (TS, p. 17). One of the most painful emotions generated by Dunn's reflections on images of social decay in Part I is 'fear of isolation' as noted by Blake Morrison.^[202] Many social realities turn to nightmares as Dunn finds that reflecting on social reality frustrates dreams of idealism; in an interview with John Haffenden Dunn emphasises the loneliness of being an educated 'civilian spectator' in a 'little community'.^[203]

The workings of the reflective mind which we witness in *Terry Street* never produce a poetry which Dunn seems completely at ease with. Describing the Terry Street that he lived in, Dunn is critically aware of the Sixties' concern with film documentaries and the disengaged 'reflection' (LoN, p. 41) on society that this engendered:

Documentary film crews poked the snouts of their cameras around these streets; with foresight, we might have felt like the drug addicts of today, such was the concern of strangers. It was the sixties, certainly – you could tell by the incessant pop music, spliced with the low hum, all night and every night, of TV sets. You could have cut through the consumer optimism with your hand.^[204]

Dunn adopts the position of a cameraman filming suffering in 'I am a Cameraman', a poem which appears in *Love or Nothing* but throws valuable light on the poet's manner of perceiving in *Terry Street*. Indeed, the poem could have been stimulated by his experience of the documentary crews coming to Terry Street. Dunn's doubts about film's capacity to catch the substantial reality of suffering is evident:

They suffer, and I catch only the surface.
The rest is inexpressible, beyond
What can be recorded. You can't be them.
If they'd talk to you, you might guess
What pain is like though they might spit on you.

Film is just a reflection
Of the matchless despair of the century.
There have been twenty centuries since charity began.
Indignation is day-to-day stuff;
It keeps us off the streets, it keeps us watching.

(LoN, p. 41)

The 'reflection' of reality which film offers in 'I am a Cameraman' is, arguably, representative of observations made by a person estranged from reality. Phrases such as 'I catch only the surface' and 'the rest is inexpressible' communicate defeatism about the outsider's attempt to observe objectively, the cameraman giving up the attempt to express more than the surface. The frustrated isolation of the cameraman is not dissimilar to that felt by the watchful poet in Part I of *Terry Street*. Dunn writes about film's inability to address issues 'beyond / What can be recorded' as if the inability is worth lamenting. In 'I am a Cameraman' the poet several times rephrases the point that film realism is superficial: 'I catch only the surface. / The rest is inexpressible, beyond / What can be recorded.' Since a note of lament is transmitted by words like 'only' and phrases such as 'beyond / What can be recorded', repetitive rephrasing lengthens the poet's sense of disappointment at what film's 'reflection' fails to achieve. However, the word 'beyond' does not only refer to the limitations of film's achievements; it also implies that poetry can be aware of a world of experience which writing (unlike film) can recognise. Reading Dunn's representations of reality in *Terry Street*, we are aware of the poet's belief that writing can take him 'beyond [the] contingency and time'^[205] of the real experiences he had there.

In *Terry Street* a visionary – that is, suddenly clarifying – moment emerges from Dunn's reflective musing on representations of reality:

Television aerals, Chinese characters
In the lower sky, wave gently in the smoke.

(TS, p. 21)

Choosing the metaphor 'Chinese characters' Dunn consolidates moods of isolation (the foreignness of the characters) and frustration with the inability of the English language to transmit the reality of *Terry Street*. (The television aerals are also glimpsed in 'smoke', which contributes to the elusive atmosphere of this poem.) After using a metaphor obscured by smoke to suggest that meaning exists beyond the surface, Dunn refers to moss coverings as if they can give insight into matters of conscience. The move between 'Chinese characters' (television aerals) and mossed roof is made smoothly by the poet's reflective

creativity. As Coleridge noted, typical of the habit of reflection is the ability 'to reflect on the words you use, hear, or read, their birth derivation, and history. For if words are not things, they are living powers, by which the things of most importance to mankind are actuated, combined and humanised.'^[206] Having noted the language of the television aerials Dunn carefully makes use of the etymology of the word 'unscrupulous'. (A scruple is a small stone, also likely to be found on the roof.):

Nest-building sparrows peck at moss,
Urban flora and fauna, soft, unscrupulous.

(TS, p. 21)

The word 'unscrupulous' refers to the sparrows' (the fauna) unhesitating use of the moss growing on the houses to make their own homes, and also to the sporadic and unselective growth of the moss (flora). The fact that the poet notices that neither the moss nor the sparrows hold any scruples about using Terry Street for their own purpose (as well as the fact that 'unscrupulous' is a word more usually applicable to humans than birds and plants) implies that he is preoccupied with humanising his references to Terry Street in his poems. His reflective mind has to work through a number of screens. Instead of smoke screening the images (as in stanza one), the images of stanza two are haunted by a sense of scrupulousness which we cannot help but consider when reaching an understanding of 'unscrupulous'. A melancholic mood (the rain is sometimes dull rather than shiny) occasionally thwarted by unpredictable moments ('sometimes') of lightness follows on from the poet's concern with a humanising conscience. The fact that it has just finished raining means that we could conclude that a fresh perceptiveness is about to be introduced:

Rain drying on the slates shines sometimes.
A builder is repairing someone's leaking roof.

He kneels upright to rest his back,
His trowel catches the light and becomes precious.

(TS, p. 21)

The moment that light 'becomes precious' the poem ends. The moment is personally 'precious' to the poet partly because a human being has become included in his consciousness. This last stanza reflects the complex relationship which the poet has with the people of Terry Street. Highly sensitive to the things which surround them and affect their lives, he is also on a different level of perceptiveness, and the consequent feeling of solitude often causes him pain in Part I.

Although an outsider Dunn is closer to the people in Terry Street than the film crews, and the workings of a reflective mind we witness in his poetry display this closer contact while maintaining the poet's isolated position. The alienation he feels fuels a desire to make contact with the people of Terry Street. One characteristic of Part I of *Terry Street*, which encourages a comparison between Dunn's reflections of reality and those of film, is the care taken by the poet to reproduce accurate images of Terry Street. Christopher Levinson criticises the meditative and detailed care which Dunn pays to detail in Part I:

Too many of these poems are mere accumulations of details, atmospheres of run-down working-class neighbourhoods that have been better, because more selectively, caught in such recent British films as *Kes*, or *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. So much seems to be recorded for its own sake (or for the sake of the standard wry nostalgia) than for its relevance to the poem, with the result that good images, that is, the culturally relevant ones are swamped.^[207]

Levinson's comments raise questions about the significance of the cumulative details evident in Dunn's later work. There is evidence in both *Terry Street* and *Elegies* which supports the argument that Dunn's repetitive attempts to describe reality truthfully (including its 'secret visions' (E, p. 10)) are related to elegiac conventions. Additionally, Peter Sacks' observation that 'often, elegies are presented as being repetitions in themselves'^[208] encouraged the idea that Dunn's use of repetition could be read elegiacally. On many occasions in *Terry Street* we realise that the experiences the poet describes are familiar to him. The fact that we can read a cumulation of unrecorded moments behind the recorded one is the first elegiac overtone that Dunn's use of repetition assumes; each captured moment hints at the loss of prior moments. Watching from the window 'this time', the women notice him ('Young Women in Rollers' (TS, p. 29)). And in Part II, 'Where do they go, the faces, the people seen / In glances and longed for, who smile back / Wondering where the next kiss is coming from?' (TS, p. 37). Sacks also suggests that repetition is a 'psychological response to trauma',^[209] repeating an experience formally in a poem can control and console for solitude (especially that felt on the occasion of loss).

In 'The Butterfly House' (E, p. 10) Dunn's repetitive and descriptive style is designed to impose self-control, to create a convincing sketch of the ordinary scene as it develops into a dream of world dimensions:

That fabric on the sofa, that bronze frog,
That strangely Egyptian metronome,
Are objects implicated in my love
And like my Anglepoise, moments of me
And moments of my love and me together,
And her moments, her secret visions in them.

Fruit in the bowl is good abundance, cold
 In the palm of a hand, four countries there –
 Producido en España, Fyffe's bananas,
 Moroccan oranges, the demotic apple.

(E, pp. 10–11)

Examining the 'moment' shows us how Dunn's attempt to gain access to his wife's 'secret visions' has evolved from those moments he addressed in *Terry Street*. In 'The Butterfly House' Dunn uses a repetitive 'visible level of contemporaneity'^[210] in a narrative to control his mourning at the loss of the tangible love he shared with his wife. Moments of love become associated with sensual contact of fruit, the repeated coldness of the fruit which is 'good abundance' suggesting the difficulty with which Dunn is coming to terms with the loss of his wife's 'good life' (E, p. 9). The telling and showing of feeling combine in *Elegies* to offer a formal response. In Part I of *Terry Street* Dunn used the repetitive 'visible level of contemporaneity' to control his responses of pain and despair at the social reality he was witnessing in *Terry Street*. In the absence of strict form, repetition offered Dunn an unobtrusive ordering of his feeling. Writing about his efforts to capture contemporaneity in the poetry of *Terry Street* Dunn claimed that his representations of reality offered 'an intuitive criticism directed at creation rather than explanation, at showing of feeling rather than the mere telling of it'.^[211]

It is important to allow that Dunn's style is more than solitary reportage or objective realism, since the powerful emotions in evidence in his poems help us to gauge the nature of the poet's social awareness. Dannie Abse wrote:

Importantly though, the poems in *Terry Street* were not merely acute, objective reportage. The ambivalent feeling in them was too personal for that. Indeed the poems were as much about the poet as they were about the inhabitants of Terry Street, or rather about his yearning to communicate with those whom he watched and described and from whom he was irrevocably separated – not only by a window pane but by taste, culture and education.^[212]

Dunn's representations of reality frequently capture his own fluctuating poetic moods, and this is one of the remarkable differences between *Terry Street* and other books published in the 1960s which made social representations their subject. 'Refreshed perception' was praise given by Terry Eagleton in a review comparing *Terry Street* with Auden's *City Without Walls*. Dunn, he argued, was capable of holding 'the balance between objective description and a more inward understanding reached through subdued metaphor'.^[213] A comparison with Auden helps to clarify the originality of Dunn's representations of social

realities.

In 1969 Auden was still publishing poetry and many critics evaluated poetry which attempted to create social representations by the standards he set. Christopher Levinson for example praised the frugality of Auden's poetry and complained that Dunn's 'subject matter is so apposite that one longs for Auden's red pencil to rid us of the excessive adjectives, the overinsistence'.^[214] It has already been pointed out that Dunn's insistent and repetitive references in 'I am a Cameraman' manifest a lament for the inadequacy of film's 'reflection' of human life and despair. In that poem the most dominant feature of film's 'reflection' on reality was the silence which surrounds suffering, and the cameraman's sense of his own incapacity to break through that silence: 'It is a silent waste of things happening / Without us, when it is too late to help.' Since the opening lines of 'Musée des Beaux Arts' seem a distant ancestor of 'I am a Cameraman', it is apposite to examine Auden's representation of suffering in his poem:

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just
Walking dully along.^[215]

Auden does not ignore the silence which surrounds suffering, the response which the Old Masters suggest is typical of most people. However, the response to suffering that Auden's poem arranges is one which imitates as it appreciates artistic representations which are able to teach an understanding of suffering. Auden implies that new artists can learn from 'Old Masters'. Indeed, his own poem imitates (by describing) the portrayal of people so absorbed by their domestic lives that they seem indifferent to the suffering of other human beings. In 'I am a Cameraman' Dunn chooses not to see the artist's canvas as an educating space reserved for traditional arrangements of reality. Instead, he emphasises the moodiness involved in the artist's attempts to capture real life in frames, poems and music by implying the dejection that this causes the artist:

Life flickers on the frame like beautiful hummingbirds.
That is the film that always comes out blank.
The painting the artist can't get shapes to fit.
The poem that shrugs off every word you try.
The music no one has ever heard.

(LoN, p. 42)

Rather than positioning recognisable representations of reality inside the frame of the film,

Dunn's simile for 'Life' rests 'on the frame'. By likening 'Life' to 'beautiful hummingbirds' Dunn suggests the problem which he faces: 'Life' hovers outside a frame, and just as it is impossible to see the wings and body of a humming bird in action it is impossible to give clear portrayals of 'Life'.

The record of art's limitations is suggestive of the mood of dejection Coleridge recorded in 'Dejection: An Ode',^[216] a suggestion reinforced by Dunn's choice of the word 'blank' and the consequent association of the word with the poet's inability to write poems. In the Ode the poet gazes on a landscape 'with how blank an eye!', where blankness is a sign of an inability to find an outlet for dejection in visible nature:

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
In word, or sigh or tear —^[217]

One of the strongest moods in Part I (a mood which encourages consideration of a link between the art of *Terry Street* and *Elegies*) is that of dejection. Indeed, Dunn told John Haffenden in an interview that when he wrote *Terry Street*:

It was an unhappy period to some extent too, because at certain points I was surrendering to the moods which certain sights and sounds were engendering in me.^[218]

'Surrendering' is a strong word, used here to describe a state of emotional disturbance. Grief can also demand the poet's surrender, 'My hands become a tray / Offering me, my flesh, my soul, my skin' (E, p. 20), and both *Terry Street* and *Elegies* harness powerful melancholic emotions. In a notebook which Dunn kept while writing *Terry Street*, an entry indicates that it is not just the 'typical English scenes [which] make his poems as melancholy as the dreary rows of Victorian brick in which they are often set'^[219] but the sense of losing out to luck and fate too:

The Victorian interest in describing life by isolating moments of extreme bad luck and extreme good fortune; extreme dejection and extreme joy. E.g. *Little Dorrit* I, Chapter 35.^[220]

Many critics have failed to investigate the significance of Dunn's suppressed but passionately evident emotional contact with his subject matter, preferring the argument that the poet's prolonged experience of poverty in *Terry Street* dulls emotional response to that hardship. One such critic is Alan Robinson:

For almost two years Dunn lived in Terry Street, a working-class district of Hull, set apart from this community both as a Scotsman and by his academic interests as a university student. This disjunction is explored in several early poems, which establish Dunn's abiding fascination with how we perceive and are perceived by others. Seeing, he reveals, is a complex process of tacit

emotional interaction and social evaluation, which builds indifference or sentimental conjecture on the inevitable distance between the observer and those objectified by his eye, on the gap between sight and empathetic insight.^[221]

Though Robinson appreciates that Dunn's manner of perceiving social reality in poetry is a humane and empathetic process, he overemphasises the inevitability of the distance between poet and subject.

In 'A Death in Terry Street' the colloquialism of the first lines implies that the poet wants to chat about the old womens' wish to 'live here forever'. The dreariness of place manifested in the poem is partly due to the womens' obsessive desire to die where they have lived, partly by the ritualistic behaviour of 'sons' and 'neighbours' as the women die:

There are some old women who want to live here forever,
But if they are to die, this is the place for it.
They take a pride in dying where they always lived,
Preferably tended by sons, and neighbours with soup.

(TS, p. 31)

Since the language generalises ('some old women', 'sons', 'neighbours') rather than makes specific references, we could argue that Dunn remains unemotionally involved with the people in this poem. Certainly, Dunn's writing evades sympathetic contact with its subject matter:

If Terry Street was the only place,
They could not be disposed of here,
Unless men dug through brick and concrete,
Or lowered them into drains, burned them in their yards,
Raised them on tall scaffolds for the birds to eat,
Or cut them up and flushed them down the toilets.

(TS, p. 31)

The poetic hypothesis points out with ruthless logic the impracticability of the womens' wish to die where they always lived. The ways of dying which Dunn imagines are forms of public humiliation. (Burning in yards suggests heretics, hoisting onto tall scaffolds suggests the gallows.) However, although not charitable, the angry images represent the poet's frustration over the fact that the people in Terry Street would accept the cruel rituals as easily as they accept the blatant disregard of the women's wish to die 'where they've always lived' (black hearses take them away from the street):

Eventually, they might find words to say
 That fitted these new ceremonies, the old men
 Having stayed in for days, leafing through dictionaries.
 What a thing that would be, the complete place,
 With priests and undertakers, livestock and fields.

(TS, p. 31)

The stoicism of men searching for words to absorb the distasteful rituals Dunn imagines for the burial of the dead is both admirable and disturbing. The idea that 'eventually, they might find words to say' implies that the poet's distasteful images constituted a challenge to the people of Terry Street to find their own words. Dunn's exasperation implies that he is tiring of the responsibility for truthfully reflecting life in Terry Street which he has undertaken, and fearful of the fact that his words might not be truly representative of the situation he is describing. Indeed, the day when the men 'might find words to say' and devise their own poetry will be a day when there will be a return to a more traditional reflection of the ritual and pastoral of death, which will contain none of Dunn's anger and moodiness. Behind Dunn's unpleasantness lies a belief in a 'complete place' (such as that recorded in the 'livestock and fields' of pastoral poetry), but this dream of community is thwarted by the fact that the people he dreams for have not got the language or reading to visualise beauty. Maintaining the anonymity of the woman in this poem, Dunn focuses on the lesson of her funeral. Terry Street may be a temporary haven from the moves to build 'better district[s]' which are happening elsewhere, but the woman's funeral and the removal of her body from the street teaches that it is only a matter of time before things change. Dunn's use of a woman's death to prefigure the demise of Terry Street (the street has actually been demolished now) and the end of the street's defiant 'mocking [of] the sanitary inspectors, bypassing [of] the housing list' shows that the poet associates death with moments of great upheaval, monumental changes in people's social situations (after death 'you walk with giant footsteps from the street'). *Elegies* also records a moment of great upheaval (the death of Dunn's wife) in ways which show the poet to be socially alert. The fact that the poet so often focuses on the wishes and dreams of the women of Terry Street encourages us to examine the significance of their presence more fully.

Love often singles out the men and women who become Dunn's subjects in Part II ('The Worst of all Loves', 'The Love Day', 'Love Poem', 'Tribute of a Legs Lover', 'A Dream of Random Love', 'The Ocean's love for Raleigh') as later it motivates him to display the love he shared with his wife in *Elegies*. The belief that love is all encompassing and absolute in its claims is recognised in *Terry Street* even if the poet simultaneously

expresses the disbelief that this can be fulfilled. In 'Love Poem', which resembles the reflective techniques of 'After Closing Time', Dunn writes:

I live in you, you live in me;
We are two gardens haunted by each other.
Sometimes I cannot find you there,
There is only the swing creaking, that you have just left,
Or your favourite book beside the sundial.

(TS, p. 48)

In this poem the poet's loving relation with another person is the source of frustration because living a loving relationship does not always rescue him from a sense of isolation, but indeed tantalisingly suggests company he has just missed. Throughout *Terry Street* the interpretations of the poet's isolation from those in communities and environments around him are modulated by the poet's belief in love's power to encompass the people around him. It is a belief which fluctuates between 'extreme dejection and extreme joy',^[222] between eroticism and family affection.

The women in Part I of *Terry Street* are elusive, and contact is limited by several barriers. In 'Young Women In Rollers' (TS, p. 29) Dunn stays behind a window to watch them and be protected from them. The barrier between them does not stem Dunn's sensual consciousness. Trying to touch the women's lives he sustains an erotic fascination with their delight in clothes and physical appearance: 'They look strong white-legged creatures / With nothing to do but talk of what it is to love' (TS, p. 29). The image of 'white-legged creatures' suggests an erotic dream; these women are not poor members of *Terry Street* but rare creatures whose appearance signifies desirable and elusive knowledge of love (Dunn does not say what they think it is to love). 'White-legged creatures' recalls the mythical nobleness of the sexual pursuit of women which Tennyson describes in 'The Princess':

Man is the hunter; woman is his game:
The sleek and shining creatures of the chase,
We hunt them for the beauty of their skins...^[223]

Dunn, like Tennyson, finds himself drawn compulsively to women even though he is excluded from them in *Terry Street*. The eroticism which pervades Dunn's response to the 'Young Women in Rollers' stimulates several yearnings which are phrased to seem paradoxical to each other. (On the one hand the poet wants to be touched by them, but on the other he wants to dance in his own style.):

I want to be touched by them, know their lives,
Dance in my own style, learn something new.
At night, I even dream of ideal communities.
Why do they live where they live, the rich and the poor?

(TS, p. 30)

Encouraged by the women's example to 'dance in my own style' (they danced a minuet to Mozart in the street) the poet's 'style' (expressing his wish for 'ideal communities') unites with the women's style. The women in *Terry Street* may be inarticulate but their manner of dressing and style of 'dance' still communicates their ability to dream ideals, and in 'The Clothes Pit' (TS, p. 13) the poet again takes it upon himself to create the 'inarticulate' dreams of which the women's clothes speak:

But they have clothes, bright enough to show they dream
Of places other than this, an inarticulate paradise,
Eating exotic fowl in sunshine with courteous boys.

(TS, p. 13)

'Clothes' are an expression of 'dream' and although the women's dream is limited, Dunn does not treat it cursorily, the word 'courteous' implying the poet's respect for their desire. When we find a combination of style (clothes and written) and erotic attraction in *Elegies* we can see that the 'erotic memory' of his wife's 'style' sustains an ideal concept of 'good' style:

My love had lusty eagerness and style.
Propriety she had, preferring grace
Because she saw more virtue in its wit,
Convinced right conduct should have glamour in it
Or look good to an educated eye,
And never more than in those weeks of France
Perfected into rural elegance,
Those nights in my erotic memory.

(E, p. 26)

To read 'Tursac' after 'Young Women in Rollers' and 'The Clothes Pit' is to be painfully aware of the immense gap between the quality of life which those young women and Dunn's wife represent. The fact that Dunn can respond so differently shows his acute sensitivity to differences in society.

As well as the fragile gentleness of words like 'grace' and 'elegance' representing his wife's standards, the style of 'Tursac' displays a steel-like strength. Phrases like 'convinced



right conduct', and 'look good to an educated eye' would seem dogmatic and superficial out of context. The difference between Dunn's recreation of his wife's style and the style of the women of *Terry Street* is that he finds in his wife's style an articulate challenge to his writing. In 'Young Women in Rollers' he was too afraid of the women's laughter (they 'laugh at me watching them') and unsure of himself to listen closely to criticism of his writing:

I call that little house our *Thébaïde*
(The literary French!), and see her smile,
Then hear her in her best sardonic style:
'Write out of me, not out of what you read.'

(E, p. 26)

In 'Tursac' the eroticism present in Dunn's memory is not frustrated (as we have seen is the case in several of the poems of *Terry Street*) but delights in intimacy. Even Lesley's 'sardonic style' is rhymed with 'her smile' which at the beginning of the poem was 'much-kissed'. The contrast between the celebration of erotic contact and the defiant rejection of it which we read in 'Young Women in Rollers' is remarkable, especially when we realise that the issue of whether or not a poet should write from experience or his reading is present in both poems:

Tonight, when their hair is ready, after tea,
They'll slip through laws and the legs of policemen.
I won't be there, I'll be reading books elsewhere.
There are many worlds, there are many laws.

(TS, p. 30)

In this final stanza of 'Young Women in Rollers' both the women and the poet exercise defiance. The women dress erotically in order to defy law and order. The poet does not wish to exercise defiance by sharing their eroticism; instead he proclaims a belief that education and books belong to a different world from that of the women (and their mockery) who slip through 'the laws and legs of policemen.' However, by recognising that both he and the women behave defiantly, Dunn implies that the gap between himself and the young women is not insurmountable.

It is the poet's awareness that 'there are many worlds' which eventually leads him to abandon *Terry Street* and the repetitive cycle of impressions which reflect his changing moods. By the end of Part I the poet's cumulative reflecting on the 'same' (TS, p. 33) images of *Terry Street* adversely affects Dunn's creativity and ability to dream. When

Dunn looks through the window for the last time in 'A Window Affair' (TS, p. 33) he reflects on the destructive effects of returning to the same social images in *Terry Street*. The poem has accumulated the imagery of other poems. For example, in the first stanza Dunn writes:

We were looking at the same things,
Men on bikes, the litter round the drain,
The sparrows eating in the frozen shade.

(TS, p. 33)

'Men on bikes' can be found in 'The Patricians' (TS, p. 15); 'litter' in 'The Clothes Pit' (TS, p. 13) and 'Sunday Morning among the Houses of Terry Street' (TS, p. 23). 'A Window Affair' displays dissatisfaction with previous reflections on Terry Street. The eroticism present in Dunn's reflections on the women of *Terry Street* produced an illusion of contact between the poet and the women. The adultery implicit in the title 'A Window Affair' does not prove to be erotic, instead the poet's relationship with women has degenerated into impatient bad temper. A language associated with glass and mirrors consolidates the emotional decay Dunn feels living in a unchanging environment has had on him:

It's come to this, that in this time, this place,
There is a house I feel I have to leave,
Because my life is cracked, and in a room

Stares out of windows at a window face,
Thin shifts of dust on the sunning glass,
And does not want to love, and does not care.

(TS, p. 34)

The unusual description of 'life' being cracked reverberates with meaning. It is as if Dunn's capacity to absorb and reflect what he sees in *Terry Street* has finally been exceeded. When a mirror is cracked it is a sign of bad luck, an 'extreme moment of dejection'.^[224] (Mirrors are strongly evoked by the phrase 'sunning glass' and suggested by the poet staring out of his window 'at a window face'.) Glass, windows and mirrors suggest that the poet's character is hardening itself against feeling. Throughout Part I Dunn has strained to reach passionate understanding (often manifested as extreme dejection) of the reality of *Terry Street*. 'A Window Affair' shows how emotionally drained this process of responding has left the poet.

Later in his poetic career he regretted his display of 'outlaw depressions', cursing himself for not writing 'with joy' (DSP, p. 20). 'Envoi (1981)' (DSP, p. 20) was published

in the selection of *Terry Street* available in Dunn's *Selected Poems*, where it is placed strategically at the turning point of Parts I and II to reflect back upon the contents of Part I. 'Envoi' acknowledges the elegiac frame of mind which the poet was in when studying life in Terry Street, before contrasting that time with the elegiac frame of mind Lesley Dunn's memory demands:

Mad for an education and for poetry,
I studied at our window,
My mind dying in shy cadences.
What cost of life was there, in poverty,
In my outlaw depressions, in your coping
With lonely, studious bohemial!

(DSP, p. 20)

Written a long time after the time Dunn and his wife spent together in Terry Street, 'Envoi' is an attempt to explain and atone for that past. Certain aspects of his past behaviour trouble the poet, especially the deliberateness with which he stationed himself at 'our window' to learn about life and poetry. 'Envoi' displays a mind which has acquired self-knowledge and thinks back to how this came about. Reading 'Envoi' we can argue (with reference to Coleridge's thoughts on reflection) that Dunn has mastered the art of reflection:

There is one art, of which every man should be a master, the art of reflection. If you are not a thinking man, to what purpose are you a man at all? In like manner, there is one knowledge, which it is every man's interest and duty to acquire, namely self knowledge.^[225]

Remembering the experimental time he spent in Terry Street Dunn characterises the state of mind he had there as 'my mind dying in shy cadences'. The fact that the poet uses the plural of 'cadences' implies that he tried many combinations (or notations if we wish to extend his own metaphor) to express his solitary ('shy') experiences. 'Cost of life' passes a judgement now on his life then.

It is important to establish that Dunn questions the manner of reflection evident in the representations of reality we read in *Terry Street* since this helps us to gauge more accurately the significance of the powerful self-consciousness in *Elegies*. Dunn's memory of his wife seems broad-minded and metamorphosing:

Now I choose to remember
 Bus-rides together into Holderness,
 Exploring the hedgerowed heat
 On country walks by fields of mustard.
 That view was broad and circular
 Where everywhere seemed everywhere!

A curse on me I did not write with joy.

(DSP, p. 20)

Memory broadens the areas of experience Dunn is mindful of, and holds very different realities in balance. Hull is both 'rancid and unbeautiful' and clearly naturally attractive. The fact that the poet 'choose[s] to remember' contrasts with the 'surprise of damp and Englishness' which Terry Street posed him. Loving memory affects the poet's representations of reality as material is turned more readily into stories in which 'everywhere seemed everywhere' (DSP, p. 20). In *Elegies* Dunn turns to his dead wife, isolation gives way to intimate loving togetherness with his memory of her life. The relationship between husband and wife is displaced in figurative terms onto the warm and embracing countryside around Holderness. Society is frequently referred to in figurative terms in *Elegies*. It is present in the portrayal of the stranger who regrets the loss of Lesley Dunn's morning greeting, (E, p. 25); the picturesque 'oldest inhabited valley' (E, p. 33) in which she and Dunn look at the lizards and birds and trust in the 'truths / Compiling in our senses, plain, of this life, / If inarticulate. I loved my wife.' The 'I' in *Elegies* is always entwined with a 'we' or an 'our' (as is evident in the quotation from 'Creatures'). Whereas much of human society subtracts from feelings of love ('No citizen but flees from private truth, / For all their attachments, the giving of love') the relationship we witness in *Elegies* adds to them, creating the sense of the stable and creative domestic world the poet realises by acknowledging love. In 'Leaving Dundee' (the final poem of the collection) Dunn finds the strength to return home alone to familiar things and write:

And I am going home on Saturday
 To my house, to sit at my desk of rhymes
 Among familiar things of love, that love me...
 She spoke of what I might do "afterwards".
 "Go, somewhere else." I went north to Dundee.
 Tomorrow I won't live here any more,
 Nor leave alone. *My love, say you'll come with me.*

(E, p. 64)

Isolation, the key to understanding Dunn's reflective and uneasy search for truths about

the quality of life lived in *Terry Street*, gives way to a powerful trust in togetherness in *Elegies*. The image of the poet sitting alone in his house 'among familiar things of love, that love me' implies that there is no room for anyone else. However the poem ends with the poet considering his movements in a world outside the domestic which implies that he is used to leaving home, and that his solitary focus on married love is not intended to isolate or exclude him from an outside world. The ambiguity of the final line, '*My love, say you'll come with me*', possibly refers to a new love too. Still, what connects the position of the poet in the poems of *Terry Street* and *Elegies* is the lovers' isolation. In *Elegies* the solitary poet is preoccupied with a relationship between a man and a woman special in its intensity of love. The solitary poet who self-consciously reflects on the lives of the women of *Terry Street* from behind his study room window roams more freely in the world of Part II, and as a consequence finds himself more at ease with his reflective style of writing.

* * *

The poet dreams, mythologises and imagines events and situations which have social implications in Part II of *Terry Street*. My argument is that, rather than offering objective realism, Dunn's reflective mind continues to search for self-knowledge (in particular the self's knowledge of his or her relationships with other people in a society) by creating and narrating moments frequently (but not always) based on reality.

In 'Narcissus' (TS, p. 50) the poet finds secretive and disturbing visions in the representations of mind which myth encourages. Narcissus dancing with vanity (personified as a woman) 'down the hall of mirrors' makes reflection an intimate part of a myth of obsessional self-love:

Vanity, I could dance all night
Down the hall of mirrors with you,
Looking down the cleft in your dress,
(For you must be a woman),

Dipping here and bowing there
To the portraits of my ancestors
That all look remarkably like me,
Their eyes rounded by looking at water.

(TS, p. 50)

We are reminded of the original Narcissus myth by the reference to 'eyes rounded by looking at water' (Narcissus couldn't tear himself away from the beauty of his own image

reflected in a pool). In a remarkable updating of the Narcissus myth the beauty of a face is seen circumspectly by 'looking down' the cleft in Vanity's dress; at the portraits of ancestors 'that all look remarkably like me'. The poet is obviously interested in writing's ability to reflect a self. The poem begins with the abstract word 'Vanity', but the fact that the letter 'V' of 'Vanity' is like the cleft of a dress turns vanity into a woman, thus implying that the poet no longer feels solitary in his reflective moods. In the second stanza quoted above, a highly staged presentation of ancestral portraits draws attention to the vanity of writing's efforts to capture a cumulative concept of self; 'the portraits of my ancestors / That all look remarkably like me'. As the poem continues it becomes obvious that the speaker has so perfected a manner of self-reflection that the style no longer disturbs or raises questions:

I've looked so much in mirrors I could step
 Into the soothing presence of myself,
 Spectating my own beauty,
 Hardly believing I am mine.

If there was an end put to all reflection,
 At night you would find me walking
 With a burning torch, everywhere,
 Looking for whatever I used to find in my face.

(TS, p. 50)

The preponderance of mirrors, glass and reflection means that this poem offers a commentary on the poet's reflective style in Part I (many poems there refer to glass and windows). The updated myth exposes an emptiness beneath the individual's self-reflection. The speaker in these final stanzas of 'Narcissus' celebrates his narcissism and in doing so reveals the nature of the void filling his own identity. If 'reflection' ended he would be left trying to compensate that loss. The hypothetical phraseology ('if there was...') implies that Dunn is unsure about the permanence of the 'reflection' he has just forcefully demonstrated.

As was mentioned earlier Dunn has admitted that the time he spent in *Terry Street* was a time of learning, 'Mad for an education, for poetry, / I studied at our window' (DSP, p. 20). Even within the *Terry Street* collection we can see changes in the working processes of Dunn's reflective mind which we might argue are signs of a maturing art. This is an idea supported by the fact that the whole collection ends with the poet watching his hand change and interpreting this as a sign of his own growth:

The back of my hand
With its network of small veins
Has changed to the underside of a leaf.
If water fell on me now
I think I would grow.

(TS, p. 62)

In his study of the English elegy Peter Sacks examined the significance for elegiac art of the way in which a self matures. With the help of Freudian theory he argues that the child possesses a 'coherent image of an idealised self' but:

If the child were to remain at this level, he would obviously fail to establish a stable, socialized sense of himself or the outside world. . . this phase foreshadows the elegist's consoling construction of a fictional identity not only for the dead but for himself as well.^[226]

Dunn's reason for leaving Terry Street is partly due to his failure as a poet to establish a socialised (or mode of behaviour which fits the poet into a community) sense of himself. The level of dreaming and social query that we read in Part I of *Terry Street* indicates an idealistic understanding of the connections between the workings of poetry and experience. Watching the women in the street Dunn exclaims:

I want to be touched by them, know their lives,
Dance in my own style, learn something new.
At night, I even dream of ideal communities.
Why do they live where they live, the rich and the poor?

(TS, p. 30)

The position of the young poet who 'dreams of ideal communities' (TS, p. 30) and then in Part II leaves a local community to put himself into contact with the world outside that community makes Sacks' comment pertinent to *Terry Street*. Indeed, in Part II we see the poet begin to use self-retrospection and the word 'reflection' as imaginative source, impulse, and means of setting loose private concerns and dreams inside the psyche in ways which try to place the self in a wider universe.

The elegiac solitary figure we drew attention to in Part I is repeated in Part II in the final stanza of 'Landscape with One Figure' (TS, p. 55):

If I could sleep standing, I would wait here
For ever, become a landmark, something fixed
For tug crews or seabound passengers to point at,
An example of being part of a place.

(TS, p. 55)

Instead of a specimen in a jar, the poet sees himself as a colossus in a landscape. Implicit in the 'If' clause which surrounds the figure of the solitary poet is the suggestion that the poet's idealism is less pronounced than was the case in Part I, since his inability to 'sleep' standing means he cannot dream of 'ideal communities'. Dunn's acceptance that the poet is inevitably exiled from other people is also less pronounced. Since he cannot sleep standing he cannot become a landmark for the people who pass by him either. In 'Landscape With One Figure' (TS, p. 55), 'reflections' of self take on a more obviously social significance. The poem begins with two stanzas in which industrial cranes consider their own nobility:

The shipyard cranes have come down again
To drink at the river, turning their long necks
And saying to their reflections on the Clyde,
'How noble we are'.

The fields are waiting for them to come over.
Trees gesticulate into the rain,
The nerves of grasses quiver at their tips.
Come over and join us in the wet grass!

(TS, p. 55)

The image of shipyard cranes metamorphosed in a landscape which craves contact with them communicates the sensation of amenable change and welcomed progress. That this is a masquerade is implied by the vanity of the image, 'How noble we are'. The cranes are part of a conspiracy of reflected images which make a landscape communicate self-satisfaction. The poem is called 'Landscape With One Figure' because Dunn wishes to examine the position of the first person singular in such a self-satisfied landscape. The 'I' introduced in the final stanza may yearn to sleep, but cannot; the role of the poet is to be awake to all sorts of representations of reality. The difference between Dunn's recreation of social imagery here and that in Part I is that the poet no longer regards the attempt of the reflective mind to mirror reality to be the most truthful and open minded way experience can be dealt with. By perceiving the dominant images of industry on the Clyde with eyes which change those images into fanciful creatures, Dunn finds an outlet through which he can communicate industrial decay and yet keep his creative mind free from decay. The fancifulness of mind evident in both 'Narcissus' and 'Landscape with one Figure' extends the scope of the reflective mind at work in Part I by including an ostensible awareness of the past and literary tradition in its reflections of the 'face' of things.

In Part II Dunn often reflects on an unspecified 'face' (TS, p. 37). The word can refer to machinery ('Landscape with one Figure'), faces on a stamp ('The Queen of the Belgians') or people's faces. Dunn originally wanted to call his book 'Faces in the Street'.^[227] Dunn never uses the word 'face' to draw attention to particular features, but rather to signify a space which a person has filled. (This point is clearly made in 'The Queen of the Belgians' (TS, p. 58), discussed later in this section.) Each face (and the emptinesses and losses including forgetfulness which it draws attention to) is found in a different landscape. A focus on the 'faces' of Part II anticipates *Elegies* since Dunn's interest in searching the 'spaces other people have filled' (TS, p. 57) can be considered foundation for elegiac inspiration (elegy is 'specifically about what is missing'^[228]).

Part II of *Terry Street* opens with Dunn beginning a journey into a wider world. Although the diction and the arrangement of the lines in 'The Worst of all Loves' (TS, p. 37) relate back to the poems in Part II, the poem is notably less detailed and realistic, more inquisitive. The absence of social images, after the many encountered in Part I, emphasises the poet's new way of debating his sense of solitary displacement from the scenes he views. Social contact depends largely on the individual and his curiosity about the lives of other people. The questions Dunn begins to include in his poems also oblige a reader immersed in reading to ask him or herself the same questions. In this way the poet demands contact with people outside his text:

Where do they go, the faces, the people seen
In glances and longed for, who smile back
Wondering where the next kiss is coming from?

They are seen suddenly, from the top decks of buses,
On railway platforms at the tea machine,
When the sleep of travelling makes us look for them.

(TS, p. 37)

The solitary poet sleepily looks for other people. We could argue that he does this out of a sense of panic rather than because he has just woken from an idealistic dream, since the 'sleep of travelling' probably refers to a feeling of not knowing quite where you are. The glimpse of people on 'railway platforms at the tea machine' is not a moment which the poet can easily share or return to, since it is seen 'suddenly', and it is the elusiveness of the contact which leads the poet to call the poem 'The *Worst of all Loves*' [my italics]. Dunn has not lost the yearning to make contact with other people which appeared so forcefully in the poems of Part I, but the scope of this yearning has expanded dramatically. The

'window face' he left behind in *Terry Street* expands to 'the faces' of 'people seen / In glances and longed for'. Another change in the poet's response is the presence of memory stirring a desire to know more about the lives, names and pasts of other people in the poet's mind:

A whiff of perfume, an eye, a hat, a shoe,
Bring back vague memories of names,
Thingummy, that bloke, whats-her-name.

(TS, p. 37)

Memory has been defined as 'exemption from oblivion',^[229] and memory's presentations make the poet aware of the tantalising absences within himself and help him to come to terms with their existence. Dunn uses 'vague memories' to show how it is possible to retain a questioning manner without becoming depressed by what we see. The woman's face which disturbs him is part of a line of thought which highlights the sense of oblivion within the poet's mind:

What great thing have I lost, that faces in a crowd
Should make me look for one I know,
What are faces that they must be looked for?

But there's one face, seen only once,
A fragment of a crowd. I know enough of her.
That face makes me dissatisfied with myself.

Those we secretly love, who never know of us,
What happens to them? Only this is known.
They will never meet us suddenly in pleasant rooms.

(TS, p. 37)

His reflections bring to light senses of loss and dissatisfaction with love's attempts to forge contacts between people. Even if he feels love 'secretly' that does not guarantee contact with other people.

'The Worst of all Loves' marks the beginning of Dunn's engagement with a consciousness of absence which memory attempts to counter. Memory stimulates the poet to attempt to focus on one of a sea of faces, to find something he can recognise. The reappearance in Part II of vocabulary and imagery which we have already read in Part I is not a sign of a poet with a limited vocabulary. It is a deliberate strategy to enable the poet to grasp at overt knowledge whilst holding onto the experience from which he has already created poetry.

As well as seeing a change in the poet's attitudes to solitude, we can see that the memory of women makes the poet more aware of the importance of communicating the power of love rather than lamenting its absence. In 'The Queen of the Belgians' the face of a woman is associated with public and private memories and touched with loving memory. It is the humanity present in the reflective style of this poem which prefigures *Elegies*. The face of 'Queen of the Belgians' is found beating 'like the heart of all I know'. Dunn's memory of Lesley is close to his heart too; 'Writing with light, the heart within my eye / Shines on my grief, my true contemporary' (E, p. 23):

Commemorating Astrid's death
The Belgians made a postage stamp
That my father prized, for her face
Like my mother's, Thirties-beautiful,
Serene around its edges.

I've got it in my album now,
A thing handed down, like advice,
For me to find in the face
Of a queen at Europe's edge
What it was my father found.

(TS, p. 58)

Behind the beautiful face of Queen Astrid is the poet's loss of his father and mother and his own happy childhood. The stamp is a perfect symbol of the way in which Dunn's reflectiveness aims to go beyond 'contingency and time' and actually retrieve 'advice', events and feelings from the past. The child's careful stamp collecting becomes precious because of the love which surrounded the giving. Despite the fact that the diction of this poem is repetitive and unspecific (the meaning of words like 'edges', 'face', 'thing' remain elusive), the poet insists that there is knowledge of love and beauty here:

Queen Astrid, that my father
Put in an album for her face,
Is puffed into my thoughts by love.
It beats there like the heart of all I know.
I am the age my father was.

(TS, p. 58)

One way in which repetition helps to burgeon meaning is the way in which the word 'face' changes in significance throughout the poem. In the first stanza 'face' is closely associated with his parents' time and love. In stanza two the poet uses the image to fill it with the image of his father and his feelings for his mother. In the last stanza the

previous uses of the face combine and create a love within the poet's 'thoughts'. 'The Queen of the Belgians' shows that it is possible to generate a sense of warmth through remembering faces. When we remember the cold slickness of the self-reflecting narcissist who boasts that 'I've looked so much in mirrors I could step / Into the soothing presence of myself', 'The Queen of the Belgians' offers a much humaner attitude to being. The 'serene' beauty which Dunn does not fail to notice around the edge of Astrid's face (and it is implied around the poet's mother's face) is a significant improvement on the 'soothing presence' cheaply gained by constant vanity.

The word 'face' in 'The Queen of The Belgians' is made to encourage close, loving contact, and Dunn no longer feels loss but gain. It is this positive mood which is built upon in *Elegies*. Dunn's development of the humaner aspects of memory is a deliberate choice, since his work shows that he was perfectly aware of the way in which poetry could suppress the expression of feeling. 'The Season For Hats' (TS, p. 39) examines relationships between men and women built on habit and automatic obedience. The conspiratorial nature of such relationships is implied by the verb 'cooked up', a word which, used colloquially, means planned. (However, it is possible that 'cooked' is a misprint for cooped.):

The streamlined women are coming into heat.
From winters cooked up with their husbands
They come out to walk alone in the park,
With the poodle perhaps, or the book in fashion.

(TS, p. 39)

The pragmatism behind the poet's descriptiveness is disturbing. The women have been 'streamlined', their bodies timed to become fertile ('coming into heat' implies the women are more animal than human). The poet finds their movements and gestures predictable. However, memory disturbs his pragmatic outlook on life:

And they smile at the young men, and may even talk
For five minutes, about the book they're reading.
Then they suddenly remember something, and run off.
The young man cannot forget her hat, or her fear.

(TS, p. 39)

Dunn narrates a moment of humane contact which is quickly destroyed by a fearful memory. Throughout these eight lines Dunn writes poetry with unrelenting emphasis on what the women do, 'they smile', 'they're reading', 'they remember'. Despite this tight control there is a touch of humanity in the young man's memory. There is humour in the fact that

he remembers her hat (if it is memorable it must have been slightly absurd or colourful), and concern in the fact that he responds to her fear. The discovery of humanity in social scenes is, however, a surprise ('The Queen of the Belgians' is remarkable for its warmth amongst the harsher realities of Part II). Even grief is treated pragmatically:

A cart goes by, the creaking wheels of peace,
Loaded up with old cookers and discarded clothes.
The widows finally threw out their husbands' suits,
On their way to decadence, remarriage, or classic grief.

The driver sings, a child teases him with an old boot.
Man and boy, they take away the used, discarded heap.
A widow looks in the empty wardrobe, at mothballs
Like old fondant sweets, a pair of shoes she missed.

(TS, p. 40)

The peace the cart offers is one brought about by forgetting the past, and consigning personal mementoes of the dead to oblivion. The reduction of a life spent together to objects discarded on a cart is a grim representation of dead feelings. The 'old boot' the child teases the driver with is macabre as well as amusing, a shoe once belonging to a loved husband become a plaything. Dunn's rag-and-bone man is mythical in the way in which he takes the material remnants of people on board his 'cart' like a modern day reversal of Charon who took on board the souls of the dead. The mythical implication emphasises the extent to which the effort to forget destroys some essence of existence. Yet Dunn is not criticising the widows for throwing out their husbands' suits; indeed the action is one marked by a sense of freedom. The thoroughness with which the widows look through their wardrobes shows that their domestic way of living and acting continues. Their pragmatism ensures their survival even at the same time that it suppresses feelings of grief until they are summarised in the phrase 'classic grief'.

One of the most remarkable things about Part II of *Terry Street* is Dunn's control over the absences which he senses lie behind existence. He achieves this control through reflection, repetition, and learning to narrate experience. Telling stories is an important way in which Dunn exempts himself from loss, and in the next Chapter I turn to his narrative art and the way in which it prepares Dunn for the controlled but powerfully felt expressions of emotion in *Elegies*.

Chapter 5

Narrative, Time Past and Making Moral Sense

In Chapter 4 I traced the transformation of Dunn's reflective vision into an elegiac perspective by examining *Terry Street* and turning from there to *Elegies*. This chapter investigates the moral readings which Dunn's early narrative encourages and suggests how Dunn's later narrative is affected by death. I use the word 'narrative' to refer to a broad range of experiences and events which are retold and embellished in order to share moral positions with the reader; in *Love or Nothing* and *St. Kilda's Parliament* Dunn's narratives recover, retell and remember history, myths, and personal memories.

In this chapter it is argued that Dunn's complex understanding of the past's influence on present states of mind is most lucid at the moments when he is narrating; indeed, the idea that narrative can imply states of mind has been recently voiced by Paul Ricoeur:

Narration, we say, implies memory and prediction implies expectation. Now what is it to remember? It is to have an image of the past. How is this possible? Because this image is an impression left by events, an impression that remains in the mind.^[230]

The connection which Ricoeur makes between narration and memory is a significant one for an analysis of Dunn's poetry. Ricoeur expects memory and the telling of events to converge. He implies that the impressions left by the events of a narrative plot are as memorable as those left by the events of life; both impress the mind. In *Elegies* Dunn's wife's death is narrated in several different ways. In each one memory is the poet's subject and is made memorable. For example in 'The Stories' the poet gives an account of the disease which killed his wife as if it were a manifestation of an event in a moral tale:

Interior ethics, like oncogenic catastrophes,
Happen anywhere, the melanomas of the sun
Or the occult surprises of contemplation.
Why grieve like this? I loathe my bitter, scorning wit,
This raffish sorrow artficed by stories.

(E, p. 57)

The phrase 'interior ethics' suggests that the poet has fully accepted the idea that the workings of his reflective mind can include moral considerations. The medical words describing the disease ('oncogenic' and 'melanoma') linger in the poet's mind. The jargon torments the poet, making him feel the artifice of memory. Knowing that 'There are a thousand plots in the narrative / In which grief is the hero' does nothing to soothe this dissatisfaction.

Narrative can disclose the moral stances which poets take towards their material. Seamus Heaney has written that 'the reader shares with the writer a duty to recover a past and prefigure a future'.^[231] In narrative, moral stances can be usefully identified with judgements made within the text on the events and subject matter of the poem. 'The Stories' (E, pp. 56–58) begins with an interesting problem, the speed with which one age discards the attempts of another to achieve consolation for bereavement:

No longer are there far-flung outposts of Empire
Where a heartsore widower could command a wall
Against the hairy raiders ignorant of commerce.
Too much morality has interposed
Its wishy-washy journalism and hope. . . .

(E, p. 56)

Dunn's lament is initially a surprise to the reader used to hearing a socialist voice from this poet. The phrase 'no longer' ironically records a regret at the passing of scenes of Empire where he may have taken a heroic role to assuage his grief. The theme of Empire which was dealt with in a negative and unheroic light in *Love or Nothing* produces strong feelings of regret in 'The Stories'. In 'Sailing with the Fleet' for example, memories of empire are recovered indirectly. The 'rusting *K.G. Five-class battleships*' that make 'unheroic trips' are related to the ships torpedoed by the Japanese off 'Malaya' (LoN, p. 36). The fact that Dunn can treat similar subject matter in contrary ways indicates that judgement as much as the subject matter provoking it is a central part of his narrative. This point is supported by further reference to 'The Stories'. Dunn's voice mimics the disapproval someone favouring empire might proffer: 'Too much morality has interposed / Its wishy-washy journalism and hope'. In addition, the opening lines of 'The Stories' also represent the state of mind of the 'heartsore widower' whose recourse to images of empire represents a need to blame the present and praise the past in order to find excuses for his own inability to be resilient in the face of grief.

The ways in which Dunn's narrative appears representative of moral states of mind link his art to that of Robert Browning. Browning has been an important influence on Dunn's poetry although the two poets develop different themes. (He was one of the few poets Dunn cited when asked which poets had helped him to cope with the themes of *Elegies*.^[232]) 'My Last Duchess' is not only a narrative which displays several moral stances, but also suggests that death affects moral judgement. The words which the widower Duke uses to talk about his dead wife imply subtle self-condemnation to which he is oblivious:

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Fra Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance....^[233]

The words of artistic appreciation which the Duke offers to the strangers assembled before the portrait of his wife are filled with innuendo sully the Duchess' character. 'Now' might appear to have the air of phatic communion, but both the comma which precedes it and the fact that the word receives iambic stress simultaneously suggest temporal significance. When the Duke says that he calls the piece 'a wonder, now' the implication is that he did not at the time it was completed. This inevitably makes the reader question why not. The Duke's lingering over Fra Pandolf's name is not simple name dropping. Rhyming 'Fra Pandolf's hands' with 'and there she stands' emphasises the contact between artist and subject, the physical creation of a painting. When the Duke mentions Fra Pandolf for the second time he emphasises the special understanding which the painter had of the Duchess' 'depth and passion'. The Duke's narrative displays a distasteful tendency to use the language of artistic appreciation to voice his jealous suspicions of an infidelity which has no basis in fact. The Duke deliberately chooses unsophisticated language to describe Pandolf's work. A phrase like 'Fra Pandolf's hands / Worked busily a day' compared with the sophisticated vocabulary with which the Duke addresses his audience ('that piece a wonder', 'that pictured countenance') becomes a snub to the painter's talent. In addition, the Duke's reference to the artist's hands working busily on the subject of his wife is couched in tactile terms in which there is sexual innuendo. Since the Duke could deny that this innuendo was intended he manages to both indirectly accuse the painter of feeling desire for the Duchess and also cover himself against charges of jealous imaginings. The meanness of his character is evident in the way he turns personal suspicion into a display of public slandering. Browning's narrative demonstrates how states of mind and judgements are affected by strong emotions.

Both prose and poetry are well equipped to encourage and effect moral responses. J. Hillis Miller has argued that narration (or 'putting things into words') is a form of 'memorial' or 'recollection' in which 'memory and thing converge in a doing of things with words'. Hillis Miller finds there is enough scope in the verb 'doing' to argue the existence of a moral dimension in a Henry James narrative. His analysis of Henry James' short

story 'The Real Thing' implies that the sincerity of the narrative's attempt to recollect or 'preservatively gather' reality affects its own viability as a moral educator (a text with the ability to stimulate other 'things'):

Heidegger in 'Das Ding' and Derrida in *Signeponge/Signesponge* have sought to define the elusive residuum we name 'the thing'. To 'put' 'things' is, it may be, to enter into a transaction with that real thing beyond the human things narrated and to respond to an obscure demand for narration made by that 'real thing'. The 'thing' demands that it be respected by being put into words, so becoming a doing which may do other 'things' in its turn, as James says.

Putting things in words, then, is an act of memory. It is narration as memorial in the sense of a preservative gathering or 'recollection'. In that word 'recollection' memory and thing converge in a doing of things with words.^[234]

Miller suggests that a link between narrative, memory and memorial can be achieved by the way in which certain 'things' are put into words, and he raises two issues which will be explored in this chapter. First, the connection he makes between memory and narrative (a 'doing of things with words') is particularly pertinent for understanding Dunn's elegiac art because a formal 'doing of things with words' (such as writing narrative) can emphasise 'how mourning is an action, a process of work'.^[235] Dunn's studied manner of drawing the past into the present in the narratives in *Love or Nothing* and *St. Kilda's Parliament* prefigures the treatment of his wife's memory in *Elegies*. Drawing on stories and fictional figures of the past Dunn makes the past a highly active and influential part of the present. This leads us to the second issue raised by Hillis Miller's criticism, namely that a 'doing of things with words' is an ethical activity. Morality is literally about the way we chose to act in life. Dunn's awareness that by working with words his narrative can discuss the moral implications of the past's influence over the poet's state of mind develops into a crucial aspect of his elegiac art.

* * *

My main justification for seeming to fuse memory, time past and story telling when discussing Dunn's use of narrative is that the poet typically retells past events in personal terms, translating the historical into terms more recognisably human. The fast fading signs or traces of history are reconstituted out of the dynamics of the poet's own mind or a character's memory. The poet meditates on events within landscapes symbolic of forgetfulness, emptiness and nothingness. 'Winter Graveyard' (LoN, pp.10–12) shows a poet imaginatively disturbed by the speed with which forgetfulness and neglect take hold of the scene he sees about him. Although a 'Victorian' age is referred to, the narrative ensures that the reader only gleans the barest factual knowledge about the place and

historical time represented in the graveyard:

Moss-obelisk and moss-gloved curves
Of uncherishable headstones
Rise from the dead place at the time of death.
A swarm of fissured angels sweeps over
Unremarkable civilians,
Magnates of no inheritance;
In depths of briar and ivy
Their utterly negative remains –
Dried convolvulus,
A bush of nerves sprouted
From lost anatomies.

(LoN, p. 10)

Stories of past class dominance are hinted at amongst the graves of ‘unremarkable civilians’. ‘A swarm of fissured angels sweeps over / Unremarkable civilians, / Magnates of no inheritance’. Using the language of class structure – ‘magnates’, ‘inheritance’ – the poem suggests that one reason why these graves are in ruins is because their occupiers were not born to power. Yet by calling the unremarkable dead ‘magnates’ Dunn implies that they do have rights to an inheritance. The sense that ordinary citizens are being cheated of ‘inheritance’ is not only suggested by the balancing of the word ‘magnate’ in the same sentence as the word ‘inheritance’. In describing the memorial headstones which are built at the time of death for ordinary citizens Dunn uses the adjectives ‘uncherishable’, ‘unremarkable’ paradoxically; the words communicate the undoing of cherishable and remarkable. ‘Un’ is a prefix often used to empty words of their meanings, and yet a word prefixed by ‘un’ also retains the presence of the meaning it has without ‘un’. Superficially the memorials of this graveyard are made ‘utterly negative’ by inevitable neglect and death which attacks even Magnates’ graves. However, implied in the words Dunn chooses to describe the neglected memorials (‘unremarkable’, ‘uncherishable’, ‘unprincipled’) is a more serious lack of respect and care. Dunn tells us that embittered pensioners claim the wildness of the entangled graveyard is ‘unprincipled’ neglect; ‘Spite of generation for generation’. The implication here is that forgetting and neglect are deliberate abnegations of a social and moral code.

Dunn’s tendency to dwell on unsavoury interpretations of the memorials in front of him suggests that he, too, is suffering from psychological malaise. There is little joy in the moments of history he chooses to recreate, but much suppressed bitterness:

Even that era of grand properties,
 Domain of the picture-hook and claw-footed table,
 Its offering servants,
 Is sunk and forgotten,
 Submerged under midget Gothic...

(LoN, pp. 10–11)

Even whilst declaring that the Victorian age is long forgotten Dunn conveys the significance that the era has for him. The link between Victorian furniture and the ‘offering servants’ shows alertness to the social arrangements of the past, and yet the gibe at ‘midget Gothic’ reveals Dunn’s need to ridicule the symbols of an age which persist in his mind. The narrative has a distinct touch of revenge in the selectiveness of Dunn’s historical references. Indeed, anger and the desire to get even are emotions often associated with Dunn’s references to the historical past. More importantly, Dunn’s narrative seems motivated by his heightened awareness of the examples of muffled history surrounding him in the graveyard. He writes his poem in spite of the fact that ‘moss-gloved’ (‘gloved’ implies that the covering is related to the sort of discretion exercised by aristocracy) greenery covers the headstones and that generations of servants have been ‘submerged’ (the connotations of merging in this verb implies that the buildings were built to dominate even after the era’s glory has passed by).

The idea that the histories of less privileged people come through to us in disguised and socially determined forms is one that Dunn shares with Derek Mahon. Dunn also shares with Mahon the desire to find a confluence of the workings of narrative and the workings of elegy to enable a poet to face up to the idea that his or her choice of material becomes a choice about what poetry should or should not be about. Mahon makes it clear that he thinks Dunn and himself have made choices which may not meet with approval and may isolate them making them feel exiled. ‘Going Home’,^[236] a poem written by Mahon and dedicated to Dunn, tells the story of both poets’ lives whilst also being an imaginative act of remembrance predicting the occasion of both poets’ deaths:

Extraordinary people ,
 We were in our time,
 How we lived in our time.^[237]

The confluence of ‘extraordinary’ and ordinary lives depends on Mahon’s placement of the word ‘time’ in the second line. ‘Time’ completes the wave of enthusiasm and pride which begins the poem, ‘Extraordinary people / We were in our time’. ‘Time’ also introduces both poets’ sense of the mundaner experiences they will recall of life, ‘How we lived in

our time. The confluence of 'extraordinary' and ordinary time plays a central part in Dunn's poetry as he finds mysteriousness in the ordinary working lives of shipbuilders, Clydesiders. By inventing a story in which poets disguise themselves as workers to occupy an afterlife (a story related to the Greek myth that the entrance to Hades is by courtesy of the ferryman Charon) Mahon narrates an afterlife in which working life achieves epic proportions:

For ours is the afterlife
Of the unjudgeable,
Of the desolate and free

Who come over
Twice daily from Hull
Disguised as shift workers

And vanish for ever
With a whisper of soles
Under a cindery sky,

The sort of sky
That broke the hearts
Of the foundered legionaries.^[238]

Mahon's afterlife is populated by a steady stream of souls (including himself and Dunn) from Hull who realise that the way to be accepted is to be 'disguised as shift workers'. The consequent vanishing of souls from the afterlife they have entered thus becomes a comment on the brief continuation of poetry and work in an afterlife. Consequently the exuberance which we read in the lines 'For ours is the afterlife / Of the unjudgeable, / Of the desolate and free' is tempered by the idea that the only reason both poets and workers cannot be judged is because their presence is not sustained for long enough in the 'afterlife'.

Mahon's use of the word 'afterlife' can also be read as referring to the moments after a poet's death when the poet's choice of subject matter will be assessed and time will test the endurance of the work in readers' memories. The significance of the 'founded legionaries' which Mahon invokes at the end of the section quoted above, is that they foresee their consignment to oblivion. The word 'founded' tells us that they are stranded with little hope of return. Looking into the sky which is 'cindery' (perhaps from the incineration of the souls of poets and workers), the legions see a world remote from Italy's blue skies and the prophecy of their own demise. The consciousness of consigning himself to oblivion by writing about subjects already partially erased from memory by the passage of time affects

Dunn's narrative. Worry about the judgements which he anticipates will be passed on his poetry is an active part of Dunn's creative consciousness. Questions about what poetry should or should not be haunt his writing. The reality of Dunn's fear of literary disapproval is at its most evident in his poem 'A Dream of Judgement' (TS, p. 51). Picturing a meeting with Dr. Johnson, Dunn acknowledges that he is prepared to fawn and take on disguise in order to be accepted as a poet in Johnson's literary circle, 'Licking your boots is a small Scotsman / Who looks like Boswell, but is really me'. Despite his sycophancy Dunn finds his poetry excluded from the 'singing of morals in Latin and Greek' going on in a poetic afterlife approved of by Dr. Johnson. In *Love or Nothing* and *St. Kilda's Parliament* Dunn's treatment of workers, historical obscurities, dead labourers and his confluence of narrative and elegiac techniques is inseparable from the need the poet has to justify his choice of subject matter.

Mahon refers to an 'afterlife' to investigate enduring subjects for poetry, in *Love or Nothing* Dunn refers to the 'aftermath' of history. The history recaptured in 'Winter Graveyard' is superficially that of the nineteenth century. Reference to the submerged lives of servants implies that the 'aftermath' which such history posits is one of continued subordination and silence. 'Aftermath' is a word which we find in Dunn's poem 'The Disguise', and at this point it is suggested that Dunn examines the 'aftermath' of history to reach an understanding of what poetry should be about. The 'invective' of 'The Disguise' (LoN, p. 63) (the title indicates the poem's interest in seeing beneath surfaces) antagonises the reader, forcing the poet's opinion that 'most live in the aftermath of [history's] injustices' on his or her notice rather than offering examples. The link between the opinions voiced in 'The Disguise' and the ordinary subjects which people the earlier poems of *Love or Nothing* like 'Winter Graveyard' is there to be made. In 'The Disguise' Dunn declares that 'History is illiterate', and as well as being a snub to the pretentious way in which the nineteenth century wishes to present itself, the word can also be read to refer to those silent people who lie unnoticed and unremembered.

Recent phenomenological approaches to literature help to articulate in general terms the way in which a reader is as involved in recovering a past when responding to writing which is attempting the same recovery. Susan R. Suleiman provides a useful definition of a phenomenological approach to literature which supports the idea that cross reference within a collection of poems is a valid reading response particularly for a consideration of the treatment of the past in poetry:

A phenomenological approach to literature concentrates, therefore, on the convergence between text and reader; more exactly, it seeks to describe and account for the mental processes that

occur as a reader advances through a text and derives from it – or imposes on it – a pattern. The act of reading is defined as essentially a sense-making activity, consisting of the complementary activities of selection and organization, anticipation and retrospection, the formulation and modification of expectations in the course of the reading process.^[239]

Without cross-reference to other poems in Dunn's collection a poem like 'The Disguise' seems bombastic and rawly self opinionated. Offered as an alternative way of approaching the treatment of history in literature the poem becomes part of an intriguing pattern of investigation of historical deceptions:

A funeral procession of barges
On industrial canals –
The nineteenth century, and last,
Celebrating itself, through counties
Ditched and bricked with its epitaphs.

History is illiterate.
It is 'effects', wars, 'conditions',
Boots at dawn and the closing of doors,
Ambition at its conferences.
Most live in the aftermath of its injustices.

(LoN, p. 63)

The 'funeral procession of barges' which begins 'The Disguise' can be read as the occasion of the death of an important industrial magnate. However, it emerges from the poem that the lavish display of industrial power is the wake of 'the nineteenth century'. Personifying a period of time invites the reader to respond to time as if it were a person. The nineteenth century, so the language suggests, has a distasteful delight in celebrating itself with signs of industrialism, and a blatant disregard for the effects this is having on the landscape. The land is 'ditched and bricked with its epitaphs', the nineteenth century leaves its mark everywhere the poet looks. However, the poet undertakes to expose the deception of this landscape of epitaphs with which the nineteenth century attempts to prolong its significance. 'History is illiterate' declares the poet, and so the historical marks on the landscape are not necessarily true representations. 'It is "effects", wars, "conditions"', writes Dunn, the quotations from speeches or newspaper editorials making it clear that something or someone other than history is speaking. The illiteracy of 'History' coupled with its 'injustices' provide the poet with strong moral motivation, the good reason to write in order to right wrongs perpetrated by the past. It is not surprising therefore that 'The Disguise' becomes a poem about how poetry should be written, about what sort of literacy should replace illiteracy.

There is an unnamed general enemy in 'The Disguise' which Dunn creates in order to rage against. The general view of what poetry should be which Dunn rails at is the opinion that writing should encourage optimism, even make the reader laugh, whilst functioning as mechanically as possible:

And they say, 'Go out smiling, let your poems
Tickle the ribs of Optimism
On an absolute prosody that ticks over
With the strength of an intricate machine,
Not this free verse you can buy at Woolworth's.'

But I *am* smiling and against you.
There is an invective of grins, winks, fingers,
Up the sleeve of galactic offspring.
Through your trash go their impertinent smiles,
Hidden by glum masks, the finest insult.

(LoN, p. 63)

The position of the poet is one where he feels he has to fight a generalised 'they' (similar to Tony Harrison's sparring between 'Them & [uz]' (HSP, p.122–123)). It is not clear who 'they' are, but Dunn obviously fears their ridicule acutely. The invisible nature of the enemy ensures that the focus of a poem like 'The Disguise' falls on the poet whose desire to be one step ahead of his invisible denigrators verges on imaginative paranoia which makes us realise that the poet's frustration is partly created by his desire to be different.

Although Dunn's response to gravestones is very different from that present in the poetry of Tony Harrison, he is as concerned with questioning the motives for neglect and desecration of memorials. In the last stanza of 'Winter Graveyard' (LoN, pp.10–12) the poet is surprised into dreaming that love diffuses from lavish 'velvet' inscriptions. A strongly pessimistic train of thought simultaneously reasserts itself to suggest that dreams and lovingness are disabling weaknesses. Dunn maintains the paradoxes which memory reveals by using a minimum amount of punctuation, thus compelling the reader to read through all the lines before revising a reading:

Rubbish of names under vomit of moss;
 Inscriptions incised
 In thin velvet

Rinse their loving vocabularies
 In the light of dreams.
 And I am momentarily disabled
 By the thought that this is real – pink sky
 Behind the black upreaching trees,
 Aspirations of beauty and love
 Disregarding corroded vulgarity
 And farcical monuments
 To sanctities not worth the enshrinement
 That outlast memory and money.
 And a white bird leaves a bare tree.

(LoN, p.12)

The vitriolic thought patterns which Dunn has adopted to investigate the neglect evident in the graveyard (thought patterns forcefully developed in a poem like 'The Disguise') are 'momentarily' exchanged for thoughts of beauty and love which can disregard the 'farcical' stone memorials. The exchange of thoughts is accompanied by a changed world; an image such as 'pink sky / Behind the black upreaching trees' communicates a simple scene uncluttered by neglect. Despite Dunn's suggestion that the 'aspirations of beauty and love' can disregard 'corroded vulgarity', there is ambiguity over whether it is the 'aspirations of beauty and love' or 'sanctities not worth the enshrinement' which 'outlast memory and money'. The ambiguity allows for the implication that 'aspirations of beauty and love' and 'sanctities' celebrated in vulgar 'farcical monuments' are not incompatible. After all, the 'loving vocabularies' are transformations of the 'rubbish of names' the poet first reads from the inscriptions in the graveyard. The dash which divides the moment when the inscribed names are transformed from the moment when the imagination disregards farcical monuments marks an important hesitation in Dunn's thoughts. The fact that the poet is 'momentarily disabled / By the thought' that 'loving vocabularies' can emerge from vulgarity 'under vomit of moss' and that this 'is real', indicates his hesitancy to isolate the ungainly and unsightly from poetry.

In *Love or Nothing* an era of work in shipbuilding and shipyards is traceable in the corroding and disused machinery Dunn sees about him, in the imaginative stories of overseas voyages and discovery which he tells. Unemployment is a dominating shadow in *Love or Nothing* and several poems consider the effects of the absence of work. Writing about unemployment in 'Clydesiders' (LoN, p.37) Dunn probes the powerful social and

moral pressure which unemployment and industrial subject matter bring to bear on a poet's art. The argument merges imagery describing the Clyde ship-building industry with the poet's description of what a poem 'should be':

My poems should be Clyde-built, crude and sure,
With images of those dole-deployed
To honour the indomitable Reds,
Clydesiders of slant steel and angled cranes;
A poetry of nuts and bolts, born, bred,
Embattled by the Clyde, tight and impure.

(LoN, p. 37)

In 'Clydesiders' (stanza two is quoted above) it is clear that Dunn feels a duty to 'indomitable Reds' to reiterate images of the 'dole-deployed' (the word 'deployed' implies an arranged scene) dominating the Clyde, 'My poems *should* be Clyde-built' [my italics]. However by using the word 'Reds' Dunn is also evoking a socialism which evades the label of an ideology which could be imposed *a priori* by Marxists, Communists, Socialists. Indeed, the poem contains a more fictional representation of socialists, an imaginary 'Red'; the poet's confluence of 'crude' politics and lyric rhymes, 'Reds' rhyming with 'bred', reinforces the poetical manifestation of 'Red' assumptions. The word 'honour' suggests that the vocabulary of building and machinery creates a monument to the 'indomitable Reds'. As well as referring to the untameable fervour with which the 'Reds' maintain their views, the etymology of the word 'indomitable' includes the Latin for home 'domus', reiterating the links between staying at home and building a symbol of working unity and strength. The links between narrative, past and political beliefs are voiced by Dunn himself when he described the political content of 'Clydesiders' (the poet quotes from the poem) as 'mythical politics':^[240]

Clydeside mythology means a lot to me in terms of my imagination and I associate it with my own notional craftsmanship – 'Clyde-built'. I don't really put much store upon the political meanings of my poems in terms of political reality. A lot of my politics is drawn from the mythology of Red Clydeside, from my family background, and from my own actual background in the place where I grew up.^[241]

Re-reading 'Clydesiders' in the light of this commentary, the way in which Dunn refers to Clydesiders as if they are machines of 'slant steel and angled cranes' emphasises the enduring nature of the background which Dunn builds his poetry from, the fact that he believes the influence of the past is tenacious rather than elusive. Therefore it is not a surprise to find that the poet does not feel guilty at leaving the Clyde for London but is confident in his decision-making. He even prepares a way for his Clyde past to follow him:

My footprints tread a rug of settled sawdust,
 The carpentering corner of a Yard.
 I made these marks, have gone back to London,
 No victim of my place, but mad for it.
 A shower of rain, my footprints melt and run.
 They'll follow to my life. I know they must.

(LoN, p. 37)

The footprints he leaves in the 'carpentering corner of a Yard' are marks he makes before going back to London. Despite disappearing in the rain as Dunn has disappeared, the poet intuitively knows that these footprints 'must' follow him, that the past is part of the present. The footprints are an indirect continuation of Dunn's Clydeside experience, a point reiterated by the fact that the opening lines of stanzas two and three echo each other: 'My poems', 'My footprints'. The poet's confidence in a nuts and bolts poetry is thus qualified by a more mysterious certitude about what poems 'should' be and 'must' perform.

The marks Dunn makes are both footprints in the Yard and the marks of a new poetry which respects the poet's experience of Clydesiders retrospectively. The final image of the poem can be seen as ambiguous about the strength of the past's influence; indeed it can be read as a lament for the disappearing evidence of the poet's connections with Clydesiders:

A shower of rain, my footprints melt and run.
 They'll follow to my life. I know they must.

(LoN, p. 37)

The image of footprints being erased by rain implies Dunn's sensitivity to the ease with which events and people are forgotten and his natural affinity with elegiac lamentation. Ann Stanford in her essay 'The elegy of mourning in modern American and English poetry' describes lament as:

the appropriate recognition of the momentary disorientating of one person's life, or even the whole fabric of society, by the death which is the subject of the lamentation. And its further purpose is by such recognition to reassert the order and ongoingness of the remaining world.^[242]

Although death is not yet Dunn's subject, his changing approach to his experience among Clydesiders is evidently emotionally disturbing to him. 'I made these marks, have gone back to London, / No victim of my place, but mad for it.' It may be over-reading to see traces of lament in the final stanza of Clydesiders when the predominant tone is of a poet pleased with his decision to leave Clyde behind. However, Dunn uses the same image of footprints erased by rain in another poem in *Love or Nothing* to highlight the swiftness

with which each day of life is erased, good cause for lamentation. 'Going to Bed' (LoN, pp. 39–40) which opens with the lines:

Free as the frequent rain,
And our footprints rise from their deepest marks
Till the globe is smooth of us again.

(LoN, p. 39)

As a sign of time passing and memories fading, a footprint is a significantly personal mark. The fact that a footprint fades unlike a steely Clyde-built poem suggests that Dunn feels that the new consciousness about the past which he develops in other environments leads to poetry which paradoxically lacks the enduring quality he values in his background. The traces of lament which haunt the poet's transferral of his notional craftsmanship to London may be read as Dunn's regret at his compulsion to take his 'political bearings' from the past (in the same interview with John Haffenden which was referred to earlier, Dunn said: 'I take my political bearings largely from the past, which I regret; I wish I could be a little bit more present-day-minded about these things'^[243]).

The most accurate reading of 'Clydesiders', then, is one which takes into account the poet's personal investment in the Clyde and its people. The personal feeling behind Dunn's representations of historical events throughout *Love or Nothing* is susceptible to emotional changes and fluctuating moods. In 'The Disguise' Dunn vented frustrated anger at 'the bricked epitaphs' which litter the landscape and celebrate the memory of the industrial power of the nineteenth century. His 'invective' (LoN, p. 63) implies that it is impossible to make moral judgements without taking into account the strength of feeling that the events of history rouse in our consciousnesses. The assumption that feelings affect the making of moral judgements continues into *Elegies*.

Before turning to consider the judgement suggested by narrative in *Elegies* one should point out that Dunn's elegiac narratives in *Elegies* are complicated by the fact that death changes the way in which he responds to the past. In 'Anniversaries' (E, pp. 59–62) the date in March that Lesley Dunn's death falls on each year has a paradoxical effect on the poet. It is a day which compels Dunn to write in memory of his wife whilst making him feel his own inadequacy as a poet. When the day comes round again:

I shiver in the memory
 And sculpt my foolish poetry
 From thwarted life and snapped increase.
 Cancer's no metaphor.

(E, p. 62)

Disturbed by time's involvement with his attempts to lament and remember a life, by 'each routine anniversary' of his wife's death, Dunn is impelled by the calendar date to write a 'foolish' poetry which considers 'thwarted life and snapped increase'. Dunn calls his work 'foolish poetry' in part because the themes of 'thwarted life and snapped increase' diminish the chances of finding consolation. However, the March day's potential to console is present in the lines which follow:

Bright rain-glass on the window's birch
 This supernatural day of March,
 Dwindled, come dusk, to one bright star,
 Cold and compassionate.

(E, p. 63)

The tears hinted at in the words 'bright rain-glass' have the capacity to introduce joy ('bright'). The 'rain-glass' implies the dissolution of a barrier between poet and a wider universe (we expect the glass to be part of the window not the rain), and Dunn's enlivened perception replaces the blinding pessimism evident a few lines earlier: 'This window's a wet stone / I can't see through'. Traditionally elegy depends on time's ability to console. In 'Lycidas', for example, Milton waits for a new day:

Weep no more, woeful shepherds weep no more,
 For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,
 Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor,
 So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,
 And yet anon repairs his drooping head...^[244]

Whereas Milton is confident in the 'repair' which a new day can bring, the uncertainties about time in the texts of *Elegies* significantly affect the moral sense which Dunn's narratives make out of events.

The voice of advice or artistic concern or self-flagellation (all these possibilities are present) which Dunn listens to in 'December' (E, p. 53) is important because it captures the ambiguity of Dunn's attitude to time in narrative. Although he appreciates the consolation which the passage of time can bring with it he also implies that one has to pay a personal price for such consolation:

'No, don't stop writing your grievous poetry.
It will do you good, this work of your grief.'
Keep writing until there is nothing left.
It will take time, and the years will go by.'

(E, p. 53)

Although the most significant meaning of the line 'it will do you good' refers to the therapeutic advantage of writing poetry there is also a moral purpose for poetry implicit in the line. The word 'grievous' indicates Dunn's paradoxical notion of the role of time in grievous poetry. On the one hand, respecting the timing of events demands a degree of self-sacrifice from the poet, and on the other, the timing of events can be said to achieve peace and consolation.

In his *Selected Poems 1964-1983* Dunn begins his selection from *Elegies* with a poem called 'Second Opinion' (DSP, p. 231) which shows how the timing of events can shake any dependency on time to set things right. The narrative of events becomes a measure of Dunn's need to put events into words in order to make some atonement for the injustice of his wife's death:

They called me in. What moment worse
Than that young doctor trying to explain?
"It's large and growing." "What is?" "Malignancy".
"Why *there*? She's an artist!"

He shrugged and said, "Nobody knows".
He warned me it might spread. "Spread?"
My body ached to suffer like her twin
And touch the cure with lips and healing sesames.

(E, p. 12)

As memory reconstitutes the moment when Dunn learns of the fatality of his wife's illness two aspects of the scene dominate the poet's consciousness. He cannot forget the young doctor 'trying to explain'. The doctor, arguably, articulates a conscious sense of human incomprehension in the face of malignant illness; his 'Nobody knows' is not opposed to (indeed it could be seen as stimulating) Dunn's own response. The poet repeats the young man's words and then translates their significance into an imaginative simile for a cure. However the fact that Dunn feels moved to write about the difficulty of responding to inexplicable injustice indicates the depth of his need to discover consolation. 'Second Opinion' is marked by the poet's willingness to be subjected to injustice himself in order to understand its processes. In the line 'They called me in' it is Dunn who seems to be

about to receive judgement not his wife. The record of events through which he learned of his wife's debilitating disease represents Dunn's disturbed pattern of mind. The poet indicates that the effects of experiencing an unjust event are emotionally numbing and artistically stultifying:

No image, no straw to support me – nothing
To hear or see. No leaves rustling in sunlight.
Only the mind sliding against events
And the antiseptic whiff of destiny.

(E, p. 12)

We could say that grief is wronging the poet at this moment, that it denies him the consolation which can come from writing. In 'The Kaleidoscope' (E, p. 20) Dunn writes:

Grief wrongs us so. I stand, and wait, and cry
For the absurd forgiveness, not knowing why.

(E, p. 20)

Tragedy has presented Dunn with an interesting subject for poetry and part of the problem the poet has to face is whether or not he is justified in writing about grief. Indeed, this dilemma complicates Dunn's appreciation of writing's ability to console. In remembering the events of his wife's life and death the poet seeks to discover some atonement for the injustice of that death. He intends to write in order to do himself good, but before he can achieve this consolation he feels he must share some of the suffering his wife endured.

The passage of time (and the consolation it brings) is not always disrupted by passionate grief in *Elegies*. In 'Snow Days' (E, pp. 54–55) time's normal passage is interrupted by a reversal in the order of the seasons. The poem begins in winter when the usual patterns of work have been halted by the weather:

I

Professionals have all gone home –
No need for medicine or law,
No need for numerals or rhetoric.

A white Sabbath of the mid-week.
Each grey window has its person.
The trees are wintry, Netherlandish brushwork.

I can feel history close
 Its bedroom door. It reads,
 Then switches the lamp off.

(E, p. 54)

On first reading this poem we respond to the poet's sense of isolation. He is left alone with his own bleak vision of whiteness by the 'professional' people around him. However, these people have had their lives disrupted, too. The day snow fell the rhythm of a normal working week was disrupted forcing the 'professionals' home. Dunn seems to find consolation in appreciating the restfulness (Sabbath-like) of the situation, intimating the ghostly presence of ordinary and artistic personalities. (The 'Netherlandish brushwork' Dunn sees in the trees implies Breughel's time, in particular his paintings of winter landscapes which have tiny figures such as hunters and skaters.) His preference for domestic events affects the word 'history' and the passage of time it records.

In this poem Dunn raises the possibility of achieving consolation for the untimely departure of his wife by associating ordinary, untimely disruptions of everyday life with restfulness, and senses of time past with comforting domestic and leisured scenes. His treatment of the historical sense of time past is less aggressive in this poem than it was in *Love or Nothing*. He also has the confidence to re-enact his wife's departure. The new departure takes place in dream and predicts a future life in which the poet and his wife are together:

II

Our mouths dream of each other, all lips.
 The lanterns ahead of us are all at sea –
 Green, blue, red and yellow, the lamps of Avalon,
 The fictions of a life that is to come.

(E, p. 54)

The narrative holds off the reality of death by utilising time created by fiction. In abstract landscapes manufactured by words and music, the poet finds consolation for past losses and 'extinctions'. Exercising the imagination beyond the particular and real is a way to consolation and relief from the shock of Time's sudden imposition of death. In 'The Stories' (E, pp. 56–58) the reader is asked to witness the poet taking on several powerful emotions and is told to walk away from the poet. In his determination to 'remember and dream' the past alone the poet takes on a burden akin to the mythical character Sisyphus

who is the character Dunn chooses to associate himself with at the end of 'The Stories':

I shall observe the moods of the great sky,
 The flight of herons, the coming into leaf of birches
 And the religious glow on ancient waves
 Breaking against *Candida casa* of the cliffs.
 If you should see me, or one of my kind,
 Looking out to the far ocean from a lonely headland,
 Or walking by the hedgerows, then turn away.
 Walk on by, and leave us there to remember and dream
 Our speculative visions of the past
 Narrated through the legendary, retrospective fictions,
 Tales of anachronism. Such days they were!

(E, p. 58)

Dunn's insistence that the reader 'walk on by' is intriguing in an elegiac context because it is exactly the opposite of imperatives which demand the reader to stop and listen which Geoffrey Hartman has shown to be a 'variant of apostrophes to the passing traveller found on gravestones or commemorative statues'.^[245] Despite his willingness to embrace the life or death scenes he sees around him, Dunn's wish to be left alone to narrate the past is a deliberate attempt to disturb rather than soothe his listeners. He realises that narrative which focuses on past events can seem anachronistic, that is offer stories out of harmony with the present. In the third stanza of 'Snow Days' Dunn touches on the way anachronism can become a poetic strategy to hold off over-sudden consolation:

III

The minstrelsy of oak
 In a thawing grove. I turn my cloak.
 White, legendary white
 In a birkenshaw,
 Moonlight and silver birch
 And the song of a snow-bunting
 Says that the time is here
 When wolf, bear and the big cats
 Shake their extinctions loose
 In the dripping forests.

(E, p. 55)

The idea that 'wolf, bear and the big cats' can 'shake their extinctions loose' threatens the present harmony of the times. All three are predators who would disturb the sedentary whiteness and harmony of the presented scene. Indeed, the big cats may already occupy

the scene. In that case it is their prey (such as the snow bunting) who 'shake their extinctions loose'. The ambiguity of which is subject and which is object in this section of 'Snow Days' means that the 'time' Dunn is creating may be present or past. Indeed the 'song of the snow bunting' may be a song from the dead as well as a song for the present. The poet is certainly striving for a versatile language with which to turn between times and between reality and fiction. At first he looks for music in 'The minstrelsy of oak / In a thawing grove'. The image is conventional evocation of Spring signifying songs of love. The fact that the poet then says 'I turn my cloak' plays on the idea of the turncoat (someone who frequently changes his/her opinion), implying that the poet is not yet ready to sing freely of the love he shared with his wife, but feels cowardly at the thought.

The approach of Spring and all it signifies of love in poetry has to be faced however, and the poet resorts to prolonging the existence of winter by painting fictional colours over the reality of the 'birkenshaw'. (The earthy Scottish word for birchwood establishing its living presence in the scenery of the poem.) The careful ambiguity contained in the poet's presentation of the song 'of the snow-bunting' (whether it is a song of Spring or a song of death) becomes Dunn's method of easing himself into accepting his wife's death, and parrying the guilt that accompanies his use of her death as subject for poetry. By using abstract and fictional imagination Dunn is able to re-encounter his wife and reform patterns of events. The timeless and spaceless conditions stimulate a yearning for forgiveness, but it is a yearning controlled by imagination and images of penance:

White penitential gardens of snow
Are where I meet you at a chosen spot
Somewhere on the ice-miles. I do not know:
Is this our story or its counterplot,

Here on the nothing?...

(E, p. 55)

The moment communicates the poet's need to demonstrate his penitence in front of his wife. Through imagining his re-encounter with his wife in a hostile terrain Dunn learns a stoical consolation. Not knowing whether the meeting (event) is part of 'our story or its counterplot' frightens him less than his lack of knowledge about the 'sliding events' in 'Second Opinion' because he is no longer alone. Companionship and love are essential elements for any determined effort to live through the harshness of a timeless, hostile terrain. In snow's country Dunn discovers consolation based on more than the passage of time.

Dunn's writing shows how the imagination can reassemble memory so that it becomes resilient and resourceful in the face of 'nothing'. The hesitancy which the poet displays before the return of Spring and all that it signifies has links with the other examples of hesitancy evident throughout his poetry. The question whether or not a particular theme or person may be used to create a poem recurs frequently when we read Dunn. As has been shown, the poet's experience of death has significantly changed Dunn's narrative. However, retrospectively *Elegies* can help us to re-evaluate the doubts and feelings of artistic inadequacy which affect Dunn's treatment of memory in *Love or Nothing*.

The personal experience recorded in *Love or Nothing* communicates feelings of self-doubt and prevarication. The question constantly repeated in 'Renfrewshire Traveller' is 'Have I come back?', implying Dunn's hesitancy about his situation, no longer secure of the truthfulness of his responses to Scotland. To read this poem after 'Snow Days' shows a poet struggling to regain his balance in a world he feels will not welcome his attempts to embrace it in his poetry. The guilt the poet feels at living in the South manifests itself in the consistent use of clichéd storybook images of Scotland, images which screen the reality of his return:

Home rain, an aerial night-Clyde,
Spray of recollection
And my only appropriate welcome.

Have I come back?
It was dark
Through Kilmarnock,

Johnny Walker blinked
Imperfectly; history
Is whisky, lacrimae rerum.

Have I come back?
I am Scots, a tartan tin box
Of shortbread in a delicatessen of cheddars

And Southern specialities.
I am full of poison.
Each crumb of me is a death ...

(LoN, p. 22)

The fourth line's question raises the issue of whether and how the rhythms and motives of a previous time of life are recoverable. In *Love or Nothing* the three-line stanzas Dunn uses

flash up moments of time and events which each poem is interested in, even as the brief moment is also held in lingering focus. In 'Renfrewshire Traveller' these brief moments are part of the 'poison' working against Dunn's links with his past. The evidence of the poem suggests that the poet would proffer a negative answer to the question 'Have I come back?'.

A strongly penitential feeling opens this poem, as the poet laments that the rain greeting him on his return to Renfrewshire is an 'appropriate welcome'. The honesty about the weakness of his memory ('spray of recollection') suggests the poet's need to confess the insincerity of his memories of his Scottishness. The preponderance of materialistic images imitates the simplification of heritage which masquerades as memories in Dunn's mind. The journey becomes a process of self-discovery in which the poet appears more and more dissatisfied. Each self-definition points out his superficiality ('I am Scots, a tartan tin box'). Isolated in a railway carriage and looking through butter-smudged glass, the solitary figure of the poet has similarities with the nervous defensive self we experienced in *Terry Street*. Philip Davis questions himself in a way which implies that the artist can discover himself, and that this process is like remembering:

Discovery feels like Memory, I said. Especially if we consider how one discovers one's past, backwards. The man who sits at his desk initially on the outside of life, like looking over blank paper; what can a man make of it, how is he to get into a rhythm with himself, be sincere, compose and compose himself?^[246]

However the ambiguous tone of the question which Dunn uses to pose the consequences of such self-discovery implies the difficulty that a man who sits initially on the outside of life may have in finding composure.

In 'Renfrewshire Traveller' Dunn cannot find consolation by remembering. His composition is too affected by the disturbing evidence of his limited contact with a past life, his inability to recall uncommercialised Scottishness. The 'names' which end the poem are undefined: 'Johnny Walker' is a glimpsed bill-board as the train rushes by; 'Clyde' and 'Kilmarnock' are wrapped in darkness; men return from 'Glasgow' without hope of employment. The 'Renfrewshire Traveller' discovers that his personality depends on shallow things not worth the naming.

The sparse language of industrial decay which marks Dunn's attempt to recover a life in Scotland in *Love or Nothing* is exchanged for a focus on the local, bucolic and Scottish in *St. Kilda's Parliament*. Focusing on the solitary figure of the poet, and the union he strives for with the natural environment and its manifestations through history, we can see Dunn self-critically exploring the significance of the past and its stories. The subject matter of

St. Kilda's Parliament has remarkably strong attachments to themes treated in his earlier collections. Returning to Scotland, the poet narrates how he rejoins a community 'that reeks of roots, that tactile, lunatic aroma / Tasting dialect and curses sent out to work' (SKP, p. 19). The smells of *Terry Street* could become equally unsavoury if the 'smells of food' (TS, p. 39) linger. Additionally the word 'lunatic' reminds us of the fact that previously Dunn was 'mad for an education' from his life lived in *Terry Street*. Read in conjunction with the 'tasting' of dialect in the poem quoted from *St. Kilda's Parliament*, madness would seem to be a continuous part of Dunn's education as a poet, an education decidedly more optimistic in its response to environment; 'I, too, have scrounged on open fields, ripped up / Into their gathering of released *good stinks*' [my italics] (SKP, p. 19).

One of the more forceful moments where we read the maturation of a theme dealt with in earlier collections comes in 'An Address on the Destitution of Scotland' (SKP, p. 19). The word 'destitution' means an act of forsaking as well as the state of being destitute. Dunn's mixed feelings at leaving and returning to Scotland have been thoroughly discussed already, but in 'An Address on the Destitution of Scotland' another perspective on the poet's past emerges:

Who would have thought it, and not me, not me,
That a boy who shawed turnips with a large gully
By the side of Cousar's cart and snort-breathed Clydesdale,
Who worked in the blue-and-red darkening dusk of childhood,
Would grow into this archivist of Red desires?

(SKP, p. 19)

Dunn's attachment to his childhood spent near the Clyde and his declared intention to record 'Red desires' reminds us of the poetic strategy in 'Clydesiders' in which Dunn declared that poems 'should be Clydebuilt' and 'honour the indomitable Reds'. The first line of 'An Address on the Destitution of Scotland' (quoted above) registers the fact that this poem begins with a consideration of the roles and aims friends and parents may have imagined for him as a boy. Dunn denies that he intended to be the sort of poet he has become: 'Who would have thought it, and not me, not me'. The repetition of 'not me' can be read as a possible defence against criticism of the poet he is as well as the poet's own surprise at the way he has developed. The length of the question however, suggests that the poet is caught up in thoughts about his childhood and how it may come through into his poetry. The language Dunn recalls or creates implies that his childhood spent in 'Clydesdale' is as sincerely a felt and rich source of poetry as the harsh industrialism of Clydeside; that the rural can also manifest social consciousness. The verb 'shawed'

(to top a vegetable) and the word 'gully' (a sharp implement) are 'used for affection's sake' SKP, p.87); they are patronymic words, derived from the place Dunn originated in, which belong to a period when Dunn worked without fear of criticism. The poet's decision to separate the colours of the purpling dusk into 'the blue-and-red darkening dusk of childhood' vividly conveys the idea that it was once possible to see life in terms as simple as primary colours. However, the truths which were obvious to him in childhood have been obscured:

My eyes are heavy now with alien perspectives,
And I am sick of the decisions of philosophers –
Dirty hands, dirty hands of turncoats and opinion-makers.

(SKP, p. 19)

A pun carefully created from the language and theory of state persuades us to believe that Dunn has found a positive and fervent belief in the power of poetry to teach desirable states of social well-being. It was in Plato's *Republic* that the idea that philosophers were better statesmen than poets was first mooted. Dunn discovers an 'undeclared Republic' (the word refers to Scotland as well as a realm imagined by a poet) by negotiating his own past:

It was a long road back to this undeclared Republic.
I came by the bye-ways, empty of milestones,
On the roads of old drovers, by disused workings.

(SKP, p. 19)

Arriving by 'bye-ways' implies how circuitously the poet feels he has reached his present poetic position. Consequently Dunn's use of language and concepts which may seem archaic to an outsider ('old drovers' belong to a different time than the present) suggests that aspects of his past are out of date and irrelevant for his current undertakings. In *St. Kilda's Parliament* Dunn is still conscious of his own writing and its development; it is a collection of poems which marks a fresh poetic strategy. These points are supported by reference to one of the best poems in *St. Kilda's Parliament*, 'Remembering Lunch' (SKP, pp. 44–46).

Remembering lunches he has had with literary friends in London, Dunn deliberately puts himself at odds with what he sees to be the trends of modern poetry:

Noticing from what they talk about, and how they stand, or walk,
That my friends have lost the ability or inclination to wander
Along the shores of an estuary or sea in contented solitude,
Disturbs me on the increasingly tedious subject of myself.
I long for more chances to walk along depopulated shores,
For more hours dedicated to fine discriminations of mud
As it shades from grey to silver or dries into soft pottery.

(SKP, p. 44)

As the solitary figure of the poet becomes a 'subject' for poetry again, Dunn realises that his constant references to his position may seem 'tedious'. This time the poet laments the decay of a way of thinking and composing. Decay is the poet's descriptive theme; he notices that his friends have lost 'the ability or inclination to wander' by observing their talk and posture. However, narrative is the poet's imaginative dialogue with decay rather than its record. Dunn imagines himself walking along 'depopulated shores' delighting in 'discriminations of mud'. 'Discriminations' implies that his poetic strategy is highly observant and yet Dunn's imaginative communion with the natural environment also brings with it a pronounced awareness of death. Choosing to focus on mud rather than people, Dunn 'discriminates' against people. (There is further evidence of the decay of mankind in the environment in which the poet spends time when Dunn declares that the mud 'dries into soft pottery'.)

The antagonism between Dunn's imaginative impulse to focus on a natural but depopulated environment and his concern for his 'friends' ' disinclination to sample 'contented solitude' relates Dunn's poetry to the poetry of George Mackay Brown. In an essay on Brown Dunn wrote:

Brown, as a poet of remote island communities and unindustrial non-urban landscapes, is at odds with the traditions of modern poetry. He is, in some ways, like Vernon Watkins, who adhered to a post-Modernist climate but maintained interests remote from it, and even antagonistic to the ways of life most contemporary poems arise from.^[247]

As 'Remembering Lunch' progresses it becomes clear that Dunn's wish to be solitary is connected with a desire to escape the 'asserted judgements' (SKP, p. 45) of new poets. His own inability to keep quiet on this new sort of poet shows that he is unable to prevent himself from imagining that 'the ways of life most contemporary poems arise from' are inimical to his own:

Too much has now been spoken, or published, or unpublished.
Manias without charm, cynicism without wit, and integrity
Lying around so long it has begun to stink, can be seen and heard.

(SKP, p. 45)

The prolonged engagement of Dunn's narrative with the contemporary poetic scene conveys his fear of the loneliness which his desire for solitude brings upon him, yet he has little choice. The resentment we read in the lines quoted above is directed against metropolitan reputation – making and breaking. Lunchtime in urban environments which for so long had been the place for 'delicate conversations' is now 'the business of capitals'. The two manifestations of a poetic solitary figure in 'Remembering Lunch' clarify Dunn's part in this farce.

The poem begins with the poet walking across 'depopulated shores', making meticulous 'discriminations of wind, sky, rough grasses and water birds'. The figure of the poet which crystallises from such attention to detail is eccentric. He longs, above all:

To be well-dressed in tweeds and serviceable shoes
Although not like an inverted popinjay of the demented gentry
But as a schoolmaster of some reading and sensibility
Circa 1930 and up to his eccentric week-end pursuits, noticing,
Before the flood of specialists, the trace of lost peoples
In a partly eroded mound, marks in the earth, or this and that
Turned over with the aforementioned impermeable footwear.

(SKP, p. 44)

From the specification of footwear we can see that we are dealing with someone so cautious, particular to detail and exact, that he never gets round to uncovering more than 'this and that'. The idea of the poet trampling around a 'partly eroded mound' in his 'impermeable footwear' is not endearing, since his activities must be contributing to that erosion. It is a neat irony: his schoolmasterly longing to notice detail destroying that detail. The irony turns this part of the poem into a lament, for the poet's attention to detail illustrates that an artist's most basic awareness is of the inevitability of decay.

Erosion affects the figurative presentation of each of the solitary figures which we read in 'Remembering Lunch'. At the end of the poem we see the solitary poet alone with his thoughts and less enamoured of the idea of being alone:

Perhaps, after all, this not altogether unsatisfactory
 Independence of mind and identity before larger notions
 Is a better mess to be in, with a pocketful of bread and cheese,
 My hip flask and the *Poésie* of Philippe Jaccottet,
 Listening to the sea compose its urbane wilderness,
 Although it is a cause for fear to notice that only my foot prints
 Litter this deserted beach with signs of human approach,
 Each squelch of leather on mud complaining, *But where are you going?*

(SKP, p. 46)

The insecurity with which this poem ends and the imminent erasure of the footprints by the sea emphasise the strong presence of erosion within a natural environment and its effect on any poet who chooses to respond to it. However the important difference between the environment which this figure finds himself in and that of the schoolmasterly poet is the fact that human presences haunt the scene. The place Dunn eventually inhabits is also a populated cultural milieu (he takes the poems of the named French poet Jaccottet with him). The natural environment refuses to let the poet avoid questions of judgement, the beach conspiring with the poet's shoes to ask '*But where are you going?*'.

As has been shown, a reading of 'Remembering Lunch' which makes comparative reference back to earlier figures can assess the complexity of the poetic self Dunn presents to us. Nothing is resolved, however, by such a reading; the poet still has doubts about the poetic strategies he follows, by contrast with, say, Wordsworth's trust in retrospection. When the traveller meets the leech gatherer in 'Resolution and Independence',^[248] he questions him about his life and work twice. Thus when the traveller asks directly 'How is it that you live, and what is it that you do?', Wordsworth has ensured that the question can be answered. The use of such repetition suggests that meaning is fully evident in retrospect. By contrast Dunn offers the reader doubts, exhibiting a state of mind which, like the sea, can 'compose [its] urbane wilderness' where 'urbane' represents the tranquillity and urban life which the poet paradoxically yearns for.

The interplay between the poet and his environment adds a further dimension to Dunn's elegiac writing. It was Proust who argued that the process of remembering was very like the Celtic belief that the souls of the dead are imprisoned in animals and plants until we recognise their voices:

The past is hidden . . . in some material object (in the sensation which the material object will give us) of which we have no inkling. And it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we ourselves must die.^[249]

Although Dunn's responsiveness to the past leaves little to chance, material objects are

certainly seen to contain souls of past lives and eras. An important difference between Proust's and Dunn's views of memory is that in Dunn's poetry the past is not 'hidden' but lies close to the surface of landscapes and books. In 'The Harp of Renfrewshire' (SKP, p. 30) (an elegy written for the death of Dunn's father) the language of cartography is barely sufficient to contain the past. Although the man is never recaptured, the world that he belonged to is. It is a rural world of past local music, local poets and local places.

The notes which Dunn attaches to this poem make the reader realise how the different pasts present in the poem are recalled. Before writing he contemplates two pieces of local history. The title 'The Harp of Renfrewshire' is taken from an anthology of local poets published in Paisley 1819. Beneath the title he adds 'Contemplating a map', and the map he is contemplating is a map from Johan Blaeu's *Atlas Novus 1654* of local places. These details make the opening stanza much clearer. We imagine Dunn with the book of local poets before him looking at where they found the rhythms of nature and sounds of speech recorded in their verses. Dunn's use of 'annals' echoes Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' where Gray looks for 'the annals of the poor'. The narrative Dunn creates celebrates the presence of ordinary people and work rather than lamenting their consignment to oblivion. In the opening stanza the contrast of 'still' and 'chattered' immediately communicates the vitality which can emerge from a concept of stillness. (The word 'still' implies still-life, temporary rest.):

Annals of the trilled R, gently stroked L,
Lamenting O of local literature,
Open on this, their one-page book, a still
Land-language chattered in a river's burr.

Small-talk of herdsmen, rural argument –
These soft disputes drift over river-meadows,
A darg of conversations, a verbal scent –
Tut-tutted discourse, time of day, word-brose.

(SKP, p. 30)

Memory is lyrical in this poem; the rhyme scheme echoes the sounds of the words Dunn reads; 'gently stroked L' lingers in the word 'still'; 'trilled R' persists in the words 'literature' and 'burr'. The process by which Dunn recaptures living sounds is worth looking at in detail. His retrospective look at 'rural argument' can be read archaically. The phrase draws on poetic language as it revives the reader's memory of Milton's opening lines of *Paradise Lost* as well as the continuation of words spoken by local workers in a 'darg of conversations'. The poet is interested in equating several memories of past instead of

making them antagonistic to each other. The labourer's language the obscure map and the uncelebrated anthologies are all part of a 'secret lexicon' and available (although as yet undiscovered) to a generality of use:

Named places have been dictionaried in
Ground's secret lexicon, its racial moan
Of etymology and cries of pain
That slit a summer wind and then were gone.

(SKP, p. 30)

Dunn wants us to hear the pain of locality; the 'racial' discrimination of one language's origins of words over another. Using words like 'dictionaried' and 'lexicon' and 'etymology' encourages us to compare the unusual meaning Dunn is recording with a more generally accepted organisation of the meanings of words of Received Pronunciation. The poet is concerned with the intellect's appropriation of meaning. Our knowledge that the poem is an elegy makes the 'cries of pain' implicitly and simultaneously record the changing nature of a locality and his father's demise. However, the poet does not allow loss to dominate; the 'cries of pain' seem taken up by others who live at present in the locality:

... cries of pain
That slit a summer wind and then were gone.

A mother calls her daughter from her door.
Her house, my stone illusion, hugs its hill.
From Eaglesham west to the rocky shore
Her cry is stretched across bog-asphodel.

(SKP, p. 30)

The mother's call to her daughter is also a 'cry', and the connection illustrates how closely connected Dunn feels the past is with the present. Indeed as the poet sees 'her house, my stone illusion' the word 'illusion' implies that the house is already part of the past. As the mother's cry leaves her lips, it too is absorbed into the natural environment. The human cry thus becoming a representation of the mood engendered by place, and equally a representation of place's capacity to hold events in store.

Throughout 'The Harp of Renfrewshire' Dunn invents several phrases by hyphenating words, where the suffixing and prefixing word imply unusual connections. 'Land-language' and 'word-brose' (brose is a porridge) are not words we would expect to read together. 'Patronymic' (that is, derived from ancestors especially by addition of a suffix or prefix indicating descent), which occurs in the penultimate stanza of the poem, is placed in a

context which suggests that Dunn's invented phrases are closely related to his feeling for his origins:

The patronymic miles of grass and weddings,
 Their festivals of gender, covenants,
 Poor pre-industrially scattered steadings,
 Ploughed-up davochs – old names, inhabitants.

And on my map is neither wall or fence,
 But men and women and their revenue,
 As watching them, I utter into silence
 A granary of whispers rinsed in dew.

(SKP, p. 30)

Several layers of experience are built on the 'The patronymic miles of grass and weddings.' As well as festivals and 'covenants,' the miles are redescribed as 'poor pre-industrially scattered steadings, / Ploughed-up davochs' where the obsolete Scottish word 'davoch' implies the length of time and generations which have lived in this place. The cumulative effect of the descriptions of life implies the richness and diversity of human memory held in the land. Indeed, in the final stanza Dunn proclaims that 'on my map is neither wall or fence / But men and women in their revenue' where the word 'revenue' is both a return (*revenir*), and the income from the land by which they live. It is intriguing to notice how the significance of Dunn's watching has developed since *Terry Street* (see Chapter 4). The poet frees himself from the limitations of windows and walls before settling down to watch people. It is never clear whether the people he watches are dead or alive; the word 'revenue' could apply to return from the past as well as to current income.

Dunn's watching proves fruitful. The poet's positive perspective in the face of silenced local dialect and placenames communicates to the reader how much of a survivor he is and they are. He is also determined to turn elegiac retrospection, so often linked with irretrievable loss, to positive use. Dunn's bardic harp is alive despite the pressure of silence. He may sing in a 'whisper' but there is a freshness and fertility in the meaning he retrieves. Another poet who values the spirit and music of community is George Mackay Brown, and Brown's 'GreenPeace'^[250] follows a bard and his harp through the communities of the Outer Isles, celebrating the cleansing ability of the sea, the way in which it has always removed the 'blood and rust' of ages. However, Brown doubts the ability of any bard to prevent his or her harp being silenced by the extent of pollution and environmental change which has happened. He thinks it is no longer possible to sing of survival and cleansing properties:

What bard now to strike
The rock of elegy
For sea, the lost mother?
(The harp is flown,
Carved ship-with-mariners
A museum stone.)
Skua, whale, herring
Litter a rotted shoreline.^[251]

Brown's harp has been turned to stone, it has lost its spirit of life. He implies that poets used to have magical power, the ability to 'strike the rock of elegy'. Ironically, he writes a lament of the loss of this power, indicating that a fundamental change in the function and nature of poetry is due to indifference to the mysterious. The remarkable thing about Dunn's poetry is that it refuses to give in to pessimism despite many deeply painful personal trials and tribulations. Dunn's representations and revisions of his own and his characters' pasts fortify understanding of silenced lives and lost musics. In *Elegies* we find a poet who celebrates the remembrance of his dearly loved wife.

Chapter 6

Mourning, Memory and Social Art

When *Elegies* appeared in 1985 it marked the culmination of Dunn's elegiac art; the work to which all his other books had been tending. Reviewing *Selected Poems 1964-1983* George Szirtes makes the same point, calling Dunn a 'natural elegist'.^[252] The particular hallmark of Dunn's work which Szirtes highlights is the 'changing and developing human presence' evident in the poet's wish 'to be absorbed in what is passing or past'. Mourning his wife Lesley, Dunn thinks about the psychological implications of the grief he feels as he remembers; his states of mind have 'social and cultural meanings', to borrow a phrase from Michael O'Neill who notices the humanism of Dunn's poetry:

For Douglas Dunn, thinking in poetry involves the belief that the poet, to write truthfully, must face up to the implications of a mood or attitude. The lyrical garden of self-delight may entice; his is a severer terrain. Landscapes in his work are ticketed with social and cultural meanings, there to be emblemized. This cast of mind can make him contentiously wordy. But it is yoked, more often, to an enriching humanism.^[253]

Focusing on a woman, and on the social and cultural meanings she represents, Dunn often finds his grief-filled cast of mind thwarted by his memories. Lesley Dunn resists homage couched in lamentation. In 'Dining' Lesley 'refused all grief, but was alight / With nature, courage, friendship, appetite' (E, p. 28). To accommodate such unusually positive memories in elegy Dunn develops an art which refers to tradition whilst establishing its own style. It is in Dunn's innovative use of a traditional literary past that we find social and cultural meaning.

However thoughtful Dunn's control over his moods in his earlier poetry, his grieving presence in *Elegies* cannot help but raise the spectre of the narcissistic author mourning for himself which has troubled many critics of elegy. Writing on an elegy by Thomas Gray Wordsworth commented 'Does not [a focus on the mourner] withdraw the attention of the reader from the Subject to the Author of the Memorial, as one to be commiserated for his strangely unhappy condition?'.^[254] The combination of memory and mourning continues to prove problematical for contemporary critics. In *Memoires* (a de Manian remembrance of de Man by his close friend, Jacques Derrida) Derrida argues that memory leaves him to choose between two schemes of mourning:

Is the most distressing, or even the most deadly infidelity that of a possible mourning which would interiorize within us the image, idol or ideal of the other who is dead and lives only in us? Or is it that of the impossible mourning, which, leaving the other his alterity, respecting

thus his infinite remove, either refuses to take or is incapable of taking the other within oneself, as in the tomb or the vault of some narcissism?^[255]

The word 'impossible' implies that Derrida feels a mourning which leaves 'the other his alterity' is less likely than a mourning which narcissistically entombs the dead person's memory as mirror of the mourner's self. The main assumption behind Derrida's writing seems to be that the love a mourner may express at the death of a dear friend is really a manifestation of narcissism. Arguing that Dunn's verse manages to escape being a 'narcissistic circuit of memory',^[256] I approach *Elegies* with the assumption that a focus on Dunn's artistic self-consciousness proves the most illuminating way into the book's thoughtful and humane manifestations of memory. Derrida's other claim that styles of mourning are unfaithful (and thus inadequate) to the memory of the dead also needs to be answered since a writer's infidelity to the memory of his wife would dishonour rather than honour her.

In 'A House in the Country' (NL, p. 40) Dunn considers the possibility of responding faithfully to ghostly 'reality' (a concept which suggests reality has the attributes of a restless dead thing which haunts the mind). He meets a man 'from nowhere or the mind's / Liberty to be more than one' who tells him:

'Reality's the ghost
Stalking your privacy and footsteps
With minstrelsies. Your innermost
Identity eavesdrops

'On what it does and where it goes with you
Among the flowers and clocks, perfidy, faith,
The groves of rooms that utter you
Beyond the physical and into death.'

(NL, p. 40)

The voice Dunn listens to describes a 'reality' pertinent to the problem of whether or not memory can be taken seriously as a 'reality'. We could argue that 'reality' is acting like memory here; it is the 'ghost' inside the self; it chooses to wander among the parts of the poet's life (represented by rooms) which have been consigned to death. The speaker admits that such a 'reality' may be 'perfidy, faith'. The question of whether reality and memory are fully compatible is never answered in *Elegies* although 'reality' is defined with reference to memory several times. The interchangeable faces of real and fictional memory are taken full advantage of by Dunn throughout *Elegies*.

Faced with analysing memory in literature several critics have assumed that 'writing

and self-consciousness are never far apart', ^[257] where 'self-consciousness' refers to the writer's awareness of the workings of his mind. Much of Dunn's writing recaptures states of mind, and in *Under the Influence* he implies that he is in control of the quality of such writing:

From inside the imagination and the psyche, the poet must unfasten and set loose private concerns and their rhythms. 'The baring of one's soul' is, of course, an embarrassing cliché; and I mean something far more subtle and responsible than either breast-beating or confessional, hole-in-the-wall candour. Larkin's 'I', his avowal of self, and his personal, lyric dramas, have seemed to some readers excessive in their apparently indiscreet communicativeness. To say nothing of Petrarch and Ronsard, you would think Shakespeare never wrote his Sonnets, nor John Donne his poetry, nor Wordsworth or Byron or Leopardi nor Burns or John Clare or Hardy, nor any other poet in which the quality of the first person singular determines the events and authenticity of the poem. ^[258]

It is interesting to see that Dunn defends Larkin against the criticism levelled at his self-conscious poetry by referring to other artists. Implying that the standard of Larkin's 'avowal of self' matches that of more established poets, Dunn displays an unwillingness to consider self-consciousness in isolation from artistic self-awareness. A critic who has noted memory's capacity to incorporate a writer's self-awareness of the general workings of his mind with the creative parts of it is Barbara Hardy:

The acts of memory like other psychological acts, often incorporate both the self-awareness of the mind and the self-awareness of the artist. ^[259]

Many of the memories in *Elegies* are rhymed and formally patterned, the verse displaying a conscious element of literary reference.

Stylised mourning and memory combine in 'On Re-reading Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*' (E, p. 9), Dunn representing himself as an individual suffering from grief, and as a self-aware artist. The skill with which Dunn structures and arranges his experience and memories in 'On Re-reading Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*' is admirable in the way it shows the emotional complexity inherent in any reaction to loss and the way in which this affects the poet's process of composition. The poet discovers the fly squashed in the story 'Bliss' at a delicate stage in his mourning. Re-opening the story reminds him of happier times ('the summer of '62' was the time when Dunn first read the stories and was falling in love with his wife). These happier times combine with his present re-reading, the consciousness of death lightly marked by 'a skeleton of gauze' as if not yet believed in. Imitating the role of the reader, Dunn suggests that any reaction to loss is both simple and complex:

A pressed fly, like a skeleton of gauze,
 Has waited here between page 98
 And 99, in the story called "Bliss",
 Since the summer of '62, its date,

Its last day in a trap of pages.

(E, p. 9)

Despite the unexpected way in which he comes across his subject, Dunn is not aiming to illustrate the fortuitousness of poetic inspiration. Instead he broods on the unexpected detail by slowly revealing the exact position in which the fly has been discovered. The prosaic lines communicate little meaning, implying a barrenness of mind and imagination. The fly and the titles of stories are brought into focus meticulously in each stanza, imitating a mental block death has imposed between the artist and his memory: a stilled sense of emotional and creative life:

Here is a green bus ticket for a week
 In May, my placemark in "The Dill Pickle".
 I did not come home that Friday. I flick
 Through all our years, my love, and I love you still.

(E, p. 9)

The poet becomes trapped between the pages of prose in this penultimate stanza of 'On Re-reading Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*'. The record of his movement is confined to a 'placemark' reminding him of an act he wishes he could reverse. The regret he feels at not coming home 'that Friday' dulls the impact of the expressions of love which follow rather hurriedly after: 'I flick / Through all our years, my love, and I love you still'. Whilst the subsequent turn to 'these stories' may be a means of avoiding pain-filled memories, it may also be said that the literary references structure Dunn's memory:

These stories must have been inside my head
 That day, falling in love, preparing this
 Good life; and this, this fly, verbosely buried
 In "Bliss", one dry tear punctuating "Bliss".

(E, p. 9)

The rhyming contact between "Bliss" and 'this' produces a complex pattern of thought. The first 'this' (pointing to Lesley Dunn's 'good life') is the one which rhymes with the "Bliss" ending the fourth line. The simplicity of the phrase suggests it is obviously possible to read happiness from Dunn's wife's life. However, in the continued use of the word 'this'

through lines two and three until its final rhyme with "Bliss" the elusiveness of pure bliss becomes evident; so the internal rhyme of 'And this, this fly, verbosely buried / In "Bliss"' highlights the shifting artistic and emotional significance that the fly embodies.

The word 'still' (the penultimate stanza's link to the last stanza's focus on the story 'Bliss') ends the story by Katherine Mansfield called 'Bliss', and to suggest that Dunn wants the word to be as elusive and breath-catching in his own poetry as it is in Mansfield's prose. However, the stillness which ends Mansfield's story has similarities with the stilled qualities of life which Dunn addresses in his poem. Bertha Mason shares one sense of bliss with Pearl Fulton as they stand before a beautiful pear tree; she then sees her husband embracing Pearl and her bliss is complicated by pain, a state subtly monitored in the simultaneously elegiac and blissful final sentence of the story. 'The pear tree was as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still.'^[260] Dunn displays a comparable talent for choosing words and images which hold opposite feelings in a momentary balance. The fly is like a 'tear' (which belongs to another period of reading) and a 'punctuating' mark. As such it is a reminder of the strength of emotion the poet once allowed himself to show and a symbol of his current attempt to view experience in a controlled way. His skill with rhyme and rhythm allows him to show how poetic movements can help to absorb such intense moments. The incisiveness of the verb 'punctuating' and its length in a line of short rhythms affects the final word of the poem "Bliss" ('one dry tear punctuating "Bliss"') by overemphasising the poem's end. A tear is round and so the punctuation the poet sees in the fly's position may be a full stop. However, earlier in the line it was a comma which punctuated "Bliss". The contrast ensures that by the end of the poem rhythms and rhymes make the poem stir with the revival of a lyrical strength.

Elegies record a man's recovery from a tremendous blow to his life and to his writing. Discovering his wife as a subject for writing revitalises a numbed emotional and creative life. In 'Re-reading Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss and Other Stories*' the touch of regret which the poet expresses as he remembers not coming home one evening is not developed. The regret is stimulated by a bus ticket used as a bookmark. As such regret is not caused by the poet's decision to use his wife's demise as subject for poetry but rather because Dunn cannot now atone for the past. Guilt is a theme Peter Porter looks for in *Elegies* and discovers its absence:

These *Elegies* have their bitternesses, but their extraordinary, naked naturalness owes much to there being no admixture of guilt in his recreation of the life he and his wife lived.

The art of Dunn's new poems is considerable, but it is an art of enrichment not of concealment, or of the powerful stripping away of alibis.^[261]

One such bitterness occurs in 'Reincarnations' (E, p. 44). The poem begins by showing how easily and unexpectedly shame can manifest itself in the poet's consciousness:

The kitten that befriends me at its gate
Purrs, rubs against me, until I say goodbye,
Stroking its coat, and asking 'Why? Why? Why?'
For now, I know the shame of being late
Too late. . . .

(E, p. 44)

A quiet, soft and gentle moment stirs a sense of shame the cause of which is unclear although we can suggest several possibilities. Maybe the poet feels he should have said 'goodbye' to his wife more lovingly, or even have prevented her final leave taking. His disturbed state of mind compels him to mourn:

And I must mourn
Until Equator crawls to Capricorn
Or murder in the sun melts down
The Arctic and Antarctica. When bees collide
Against my study's windowpane, I let them in.

(E, p. 44)

The vision of a poet writing and mourning under the stress of shameful regret exposes a frightening self-punishment of world proportions. Poetry has become a stick to beat the poet into creating until the end of the world as we know it. Dunn's compulsive mourning communicates a profoundly pessimistic vision of the world, the expectancy that its humiliation ('crawls') and violent end ('murder') may occur at any time. The sudden switch from a worldly to a slightly more personable poet in his study, is a disarming conclusion of this section. Bees which 'collide' against the 'window pane' transfuse with their haplessness the whole process of mourning which has just been described. The poet's hapless mourning implies writing's passivity and pointlessness, an impression increased by the fact that iambs limp fitfully through the first ten lines of the poem. However, there is another use of the verb 'to mourn' in the final lines of 'Reincarnations'. In the final instance, it is clear that the verb has ceased to be as consciously self-referential as it was in its first usage:

I feel her goodness breathe, my Lady Christ.
Her treasured stories mourn her on their shelf,
In spirit air, that watchful poltergeist.

(E, p. 44)

Dunn displays disrespect for social or historical context in favour of the chance insights poetry provides. The 'stories' on his shelf are not those of empire (as they had been in 'The Stories') but are the record of Lesley Dunn's experience. Although 'treasured' (the word implies that the stories are carefully stored up in the memory), stories associated with his wife take on a life of their own, 'Her treasured stories mourn her on their shelf, / In spirit air'. Mourning continues between the unlikely rhymes of 'Christ' and 'poltergeist'. Since the rhymes 'Christ' and 'poltergeist' are good subjects for stories it is not fanciful to suggest that they help us to understand the nature of the mourning which 'Her treasured stories' achieve. At one moment her presence soothes, embraces with the breath of 'goodness'; at another the poet feels more cautious, at the mercy of a 'watchful' and unpredictable spirit, 'watchful' suggesting both suspicion and guardianship. Passages like these do more than unveil the fictions inherent in mourning and remembering. They reveal a self-consciousness re-invigorated by reincarnations of another person, whose presence makes mischief out of the mourning writer's relation with language and self-representation.

Not only do troublesome thoughts affect the way Dunn thinks he ought to be mourning, they also arise from the most trivial moments. In 'Empty Wardrobes' (E, p. 29) the remembered moment that stirs regret in Dunn at first seems insignificant, the language vernacular in its forms, cadences and vocabulary:

But there's that day in Paris, that I regret,
When I said No, franc-less and husbandly.
She browsed through hangers in the Lafayette,
And that comes back at night, to trouble me.

(E, p. 29)

The verb 'trouble' indicates that this language may be participating in a profounder level of experience than is at first implied. Dunn is troubled by the reasonable ordinary denial because 'now' clothes are inseparable from his memory, 'No' seems the wrong answer. The memory makes Dunn question the straightforwardness of decisions. As in 'Reincarnations' the poet implies that he knows how he must mourn in order to make amends for the mistake he made:

Now there is grief the couturier, and grief
The needlewoman mourning with her hands,
And grief the scattered finery of life,
The clothes she gave as keepsakes to her friends.

(E, p. 29)

The rhymes in this stanza record the stirring of something lively, as 'grief' rhymes with 'life'. Since the rhyme schemes in the previous stanza had been deliberately predictable this unusual rhyme seems to want a new beginning. The stirring rhyme comes amongst a series of images which suggest grief's ordering and controlling presence. (It is a designer of clothes, a worker.) Neither 'grief the couturier' nor 'grief / The needlewoman' seems as rich or touching as 'grief the scattered finery of life, / The clothes she gave as keepsakes to her friends'. This final image of grief combines a 'scattered' freedom with a controlled act of giving away in order to be remembered. The 'trouble' Dunn wants his wife's memory to cause is no more violent than this. And yet there is an echo of another elegist's rhyming which if remarked upon suggests how close Dunn's verse always is to a compulsive passionate mourning similar to the violence of his mourning in the first part of 'Reincarnations'. Dunn's rhyming of 'grief' and 'life' is such an unusual one that it is a surprise to read it in *Adonais*. Shelley intends the rhymes to reflect on 'strife' and the violence of existence:

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep –
 He hath awakened from the dream of life –
 'Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep
 With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
 And in mad trance strike with our spirit's knife
 Invulnerable nothings – We decay
 Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief
 Convulse us and consume us day by day,
 And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.^[262]

'Grief' is linked to 'life' by the rhymes 'strife' and 'knife', 'strife' and 'knife' heightening the grief already present in daily living. Shelley's attempt to console himself by arguing that *Adonais* 'is not dead' and his rhyme of 'grief' with 'life' are very much in the spirit of Dunn's elegy. The beauty of the final verse of 'Empty Wardrobes' comes from the poet's decision to allow grief to continue to make the clothes that his wife might have worn, as if she is still alive. Grief commemorates the past and brings a strange joy to the present.

To appreciate the originality with which Dunn's language, rhythms and rhymes debate the significance of confessional mourning, it is relevant to read Peter Porter's 'Exequy'^[263] (one of a series of elegies written on the death of his wife, published in *The Cost of Seriousness* (1978)^[264]). To look at this poem after *Elegies* is to witness the effect of a devastating guilt on the process of mourning. Porter mourns his wife's memory in tetrameter, (the rhetorical device of Henry King who used the rhyme to mourn his own wife in 'An Exequy'^[265]). By doing so his art displays a conscious element of literary

and historical reference which exceeds anything in *Elegies*. Porter uses tetrameter to keep a measured regularity and to imitate the inevitable approach of the time when he will have to pay the death he owes his wife. The metre is all-important in Porter's poem. It imitates and creates the restraints which guilt places on the poet:

The channels of our lives are blocked,
The hand is stopped upon the clock,
No-one can say why hearts will break
And marriages are all opaque:
A map of loss, some posted cards,
The living house reduced to shards,
The abstract hell of memory,
The pointlessness of poetry.^[266]

The poet's life is terribly still after the loss of his wife. The rhyme of 'blocked' and 'clock', combined within a cramped metrical space, creates a sense of claustrophobia. There is no room in these lines for alternative suggestions. The metre relentlessly records a list without waiting to suggest their significance. When Porter finally suggests what it is these instances of memory are saying, he confesses why memory seems an 'abstract hell' to him, poetry pointless:

These are the instances which tell
Of something which I know full well,
I owe a death to you – one day
The time will come for me to pay
When your slim shape from photographs
Stands at my door and gently asks
If I have any work to do
Or will I come to bed with you.^[267]

Porter's confession emerges reluctantly and at the last possible moment, 'something which I know full well'. The lines communicate an admixture of guilt, penitence and love. Although both Dunn and Porter identify memories with heightened literary awareness Porter's literary references cannot be separated from his feelings of guilt. Porter's self-reproach is relentless; even in the moment when the wife comes to his door there is the hint that the poet blames himself for putting his work before her needs. The poet's memory of his wife is inseparable from his guilty feeling. The poet awaits the day when his wife will return for him. She is not a frightening representative of death, but Porter finds even her gentleness terrifying. The poem ends with the poet waiting for the moment. This seems unsatisfactory until we accept that it is the sense of having matters outstanding and unresolved which is affecting Porter's creative imagination. Mary Jacobus succinctly

voices just such a consequence of reminiscence:

Reminiscence takes the form of purgatorial circularity; nothing is resolved, nothing renewed.
Writing is death [and] a woman delivers the coup de grâce.^[268]

The past can provide a source of strength and attachment (as we see in Dunn's writing) but equally it can be a strength-sapping legacy. Porter feels threatened by his memories of his wife. His distance from a substantial sense of her being is expressed by the reduction of her presence to a 'slim figure in a photograph'. Remembering a woman threatens to incapacitate a poet's art and yet paradoxically also sustains it. In the following subsection I want to examine the significance of Dunn's approach to a feminine presence in *Elegies*.

Throughout *Elegies* Dunn's memory of his wife is stimulated by many points of contact with art. She was an artist herself, and 'a curator of an art gallery'.^[269] In an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* Dunn discusses the impact which contact with a woman artist has had on his work. Whilst rejecting the influence of ideology and -isms, he clearly regards an awareness of the feminine to be an essential part of being human:

Like loving and living with a woman, learning from a woman writer also leads a man to acquire or stimulate the feminine dimensions of his identity, as if encouraging the mind and imagination to be human entirely instead of male or female.^[270]

In 'Attics' (E, p. 24) Dunn uses a painting by a woman to try to gain access to his wife's feminine purity. Purity is something which characterises the sort of elegy he would like to write. At one point in *Elegies* he declares that he is 'dedicated to the one pure elegy' (E, p. 58). However, like Sisyphus, the poet feels doomed never to achieve his goal. In 'Attics' we can see a poet reconciling himself to the elusiveness of 'pure elegy'. Viewing the 'white room' stimulates 'the feminine dimensions of his identity'. He strains to find words for the 'unutterably feminine' and creates a poem about a woman's frame of mind. The position Dunn adopts before a room pure in its whiteness shows a poet who feels ideals are almost in his grasp. By assuming a feminine critique Dunn achieves insight into realms of experience within and behind her empty room, and manages to enter the formidable 'feminine' silence that the room is filled with:

A room, unutterably feminine,
A room she dreamed, but painted by Gwen John.

(E, p. 24)

Dunn manipulates traditional associations of purity with whiteness to affirm that what he sees is the purity of his wife's dreaming 'mind'. This is a crucial point, since faith in dreams and ideals is foundation for the positive direction of his verse:

I see a white-distempered attic in
 Her mind, pastel, and faintly put-upon
 By men who cannot understand the light
 From the window, lingering on the lace
 Curtain's folds, or the disturbing woman-white
 Illumination on the mirror, almost a face.

(E, p. 24)

The whiteness of both women colours Dunn's use of the memory of his wife. It is 'disturbing' in a positive way, encouraging the poet to try to see the faces he can 'almost' catch sight of. Through whiteness, he implies, he might reach an appreciation of the spiritual in ordinary things. Although her face is tantalisingly out of sight, focusing on 'white' memory has produced ecstasy in the poet which creates a voice and an implied physical presence. In the first part of the sonnet an aura of ghostly purity accumulated around the memory of a woman. The images conjured by words like 'pastel', 'faintly', 'woman-white', 'light / From the window' work to assimilate Lesley Dunn with things ghostly and mysterious as well as pure. They give purity a fragile, slightly anachronistic presence; the image seems slightly out of focus. Dunn's specific choice of 'Gwen John' and the phrase 'woman-white' which echoes Wilkie Collins' title *The Woman in White*^[271] refer us to a different age's concept of purity and the disturbing states of mind with which whiteness has been associated. The last six lines of the poem hold things in a firmer focus, which gives the moment Dunn is recalling a solidity and life in the present:

A girl is sitting on a fragile chair
 With her sad brushes and her thoughts, her hair
 In tints of autumn, and her skin says, *Kiss,*
Kiss, kiss my skin, for I am touch and sense
Brushed womanly into this eloquence,
Unclothed in paint to teach you nakedness.

(E, p. 24)

Dunn's phantom sense of woman is replaced by a surer image of woman, which craves and desires even closer connection and loving caresses from him. Inside his wife's dream Dunn uses sensuous images to emphasise close intimacy between living experience and memory. Dunn shows that purity need not become a forgotten and outdated value but that it can be sensually placed within our reach. In the present pure art is connected with a voice stimulating self-analysis and education in virtues like humility: '*Unclothed in paint to teach you nakedness*'. Dunn's memory of his wife includes a concept of the 'pure' which Dunn writes about in order to approach the 'pure elegy' which he craves. His

manner of writing and engaging with the memory of a loved woman is uniquely positive in ways which reinterpret other contemporary poets' approaches to elegy and the purity of an art.

Dunn's reference to 'reality' in 'December' (E, p. 53) treats the concept as if it were a technical term needing definition before he can continue. The moment draws attention to Dunn's artistic self-awareness:

Reality, I remember you as her soft kiss
At morning. You were her presence beside me.

(E, p. 53)

Remembering 'reality' as his wife's 'soft kiss', the normal morning's greeting, Dunn implies that he is mourning the demise of lovingness in reality as well as his wife's death, 'Reality, I remember you'. Reality's softer characteristics are present in earlier memories of people walking beside each other, their contact reflecting the gentleness of a whole generation:

Ours was a gentle generation, pacific,
In love with music, art and restaurants,
And he with she, strolling among the canvases,
And she with him, at concerts, coats on their laps.

(E, p. 53)

Dunn's style convinces us that memory recaptures a reality. Not only is the gentleness of the generation related to the characteristics of 'reality', but the normality of visiting galleries and concerts reassures us of reality too. Dunn's lines deliver their meaning, without surprise or violent wrenching of the sense of words. The normal activity is given additional significance when Dunn suggests that a generation's love of 'music, art and restaurants' contributed to a peace-filled state of being, 'Ours was a gentle generation, pacific'. And yet the 'reality' remembered by Dunn is not simplistic realism. Regretting the loss of a 'gentle generation' Dunn is idealising the past while pretending accurate representation. Remembering his part in the 'gentle generation' he is shielded from the knowledge of more violent events: 'No friend of ours had ever been to war'. As we have seen, memory organises a 'reality' which recreates the normative values of gentleness and peace which constituted a sense of reality for the artists of Dunn's generation. The present on the other hand is marked by events which are unreal and ugly. The gentleness of 'reality' is contravened by Dunn's stay in 'a city of cold slumbers' where examples of heat are either unnaturally hot ('molten dusk' reminds us of industrial works) or self-destructive ('wet fires'):

Reality, I remember you as her soft kiss
 At morning. You were her presence beside me.
 The red sun drips its molten dusk. Wet fires
 Embrace the barren orchards, these gardens in
 A city of cold slumbers. I am trapped in it.
 It is December. The town is part of my mourning
 And I, too, am part of whatever it grieves for.
 Whose tears are these, pooled on this cellophane?

(E, p. 53)

Words like 'embrace' and 'slumber' relate to the 'reality' of Lesley's soft kiss and presence in Dunn's memory, implying that gentleness may be still partially active as an effective element of the present. The stronger impression is that gentleness has left the scene. This loss is not just a cause for private lament. Dunn makes the town a part of his mourning and by doing so he makes the town an extension of himself and his private grief. He also makes himself an extension of the town and 'whatever it grieves' for. This implies that there is more than one reason for grief present in the world, and that Dunn feels the need to engage with other griefs. Just as his remembrance of 'reality' declared its interest in a conscious process of peaceful living, so Dunn's art of mourning declares its interest in analysing a grieving existence. The question which ends the verse suggests that the desire to universalise every private experience in art may deny the individuality of the writer. By having tears pooled on cellophane Dunn emphasises the highly contrived nature of his mourning and its efforts to extend beyond his own grieving character. It is as if the poet has set up the cellophane to collect tears for analysis.

As we have seen, Dunn's artistic self-consciousness makes memory organise a 'reality' which recreates and analyses the poet's normative values. Memory also reminds Dunn of what he has lost, and the two distinctive styles of writing in 'December' (one for the gentle memories of the past and one for the self-destructive present) suggest the difficulty of reconciling private gentle memories (associated with the values of a past artistic lifestyle) with an uncomfortable present (associated with abnormally stunted town landscapes). Dunn uses these difficulties to be self-critical about his own poetic strategies, including his attempts to make private experience address more than the individual's feelings. Turning to 'The Butterfly House' (E, pp. 10–11), we can see that Dunn displays a social consciousness in the way the memory of his wife haunts him into analysing the significance of a domestic scene they shared. The poem has as a sub-heading a quotation from Adelaide in *Guys and Dolls*. 'I want a normal life, with wallpaper, and bookends.' Adelaide uses the word 'normal' to mean that she wishes to be like everyone else. 'The

Butterfly House' is not a crude sneer at Adelaide's position, but a tender analysis of the shortcomings of a 'normal' domestic lifestyle. The poem begins with Dunn's effort to persuade himself of the orderly nature of his life despite his wife's death. He maps out his part in the 'normal' drama: 'A citizen within the audience / Administered by HM Government, / Hull District Council, The Inland Revenue, / North-Eastern Gas, Yorkshire Electricity' (E, p. 10). However, the fact of his wife's death shows up the falseness of the normal situation. Dunn writes as if she is still alive, and so the moments of normal domesticity are moments of self-delusion:

As I draw the curtains, this, I tell myself,
Is how it feels to be at home, waiting
For my love's car, its headlamps on the house,
The garage door with its familiar groan.

(E, p. 10)

Drawing us into his living room Dunn gives the reader a glimpse of a private moment. The domestic setting helps to orientate Dunn's grief around the objects surrounding him. Dunn's memory of his wife is implicated in the domestic reality he writes about rather than spelled out as it had been in 'December'. When he briefly acknowledges remembering her the memory is elusive, its significance secret:

That fabric on the sofa, that bronze frog,
That strangely Egyptian metronome,
Are objects implicated in my love
And, like my Anglepoise, moments of me
And moments of my love and me together,
And her moments, her secret visions in them.

(E, p. 10)

Dunn uses domestic objects as if they are photographic evidence of love, 'implicated' signifying that love finds certain objects guilty of reminding the poet of past 'moments'.

Despite the dominant sense of personal privacy in a domestic scene, Dunn avoids writing poetry relevant only to his own feeling. Privacy can refer beyond the individual. In his book *Affairs of the Hearth* Rod Edmond discusses the artistic consequences which arise from shifting the focus of life indoors:

Only when this [the move indoors] has happened can writing and painting begin to use domestic interiors to suggest a symbiotic and expressive relationship between people and their homes. The separation of public and private space, corridors, doors and keyholes, privacy and its transgression, opened up a new world to the writer and painter, a domestic continent waiting to be explored.^[272]

For Edmond domestic realism involves the types of relationship people have with their homes and creates a new world for the artist to explore. In 'The Butterfly House' Dunn's combination of mourning and domestic realism opens up a new world of emotional responses. Dunn finds no 'comfort' for his wife's death in his room of material comforts. The play on the word 'comfort' effectively unites the private and material significance of 'the objects' around the poet:

There's Fujiyama, white on cloisonné,
Manhattan water-coloured in the 1920's,
A girl at Spurn, the Clyde, Lord's Cricket Ground.
These books are bound in skins of animals.
The cruelties of comfort know no end
And good taste eats the properties of world
To make a world, a viewpoint of the heart.

(E, p. 11)

As is so often the case in *Elegies* the poet refers to emotive and sentimental subjects to raise social as well as artistic awareness. There is a use of a sentimental moment in 'Birch Room' (E, p. 22) which begins with a re-creation of a picture taken from Lesley Dunn's 'chinoiserie'. Dunn focuses on the pathos of an artistic imitation of nature 'Rotund and acrobatic tits explored / Bud-studded branches on our tallest birch tree' whilst also insisting that the room is 'a room like art'. George Szirtes has addressed the significance of Dunn's simplistic views:

Despite the simplistic views taken, the passion behind the poems is genuine and occasionally moving. . . . It reminds me of the recent work of Tony Harrison: less rhetorically mature, it is in a way more promising because it never threatens to become imprisoned in its attitudes.^[273]

The rooms Lesley Dunn lived and died in become the space within which worlds are miniaturised and simplistic views discussed. The fact that Dunn approaches the 'cruelties of comfort' from a domestic position is important because he uses the domestic and familiar to control strongly felt emotion. Dunn is aware of several 'cruelties' evident in his room. As he looks at his room he remembers 'that slave trade in raw materials' which has helped to make the room a home. A powerful indignation is hinted at in the suggestion that the books bound in animal skins are 'cruelties of comfort', violations of animal rights. Scaled down to domestic requirements these 'cruelties' become anecdotes of Dunn's pain-filled familiarity with a room which had suggested 'moments of my love and me together'. Indeed we can argue that the room is a manifestation of Dunn's own being. (In the final line of the poem he refers to a river as if it is comparable with himself; 'It, too, alive in the long room of its being'.) He avoids narcissism because the room skilfully contains

moments of his wife too. The 'viewpoint of the heart' tells him that the 'cruelties of comfort know no end', and as we have seen such feeling sensitivity emphasises the poet's close awareness of human activities, as well as his mournful feelings. The 'viewpoint of the heart' is not the only perspective which Dunn's memory of his wife encourages him to take:

A stained-glass butterfly adorns my window.
Blue, green, red and yellow it is, surreal
It is also. I call this The Butterfly House.

(E, p. 11)

It is not fanciful to suggest that the 'stained glass butterfly' is deliberately placed within a 'window' to offer an alternative to the 'viewpoint of the heart' of the previous line. We are struck by the colours of the verse, and a new confidence of tone in the poet's delivery, 'it is', 'it is'. We sense Dunn's comfort and familiarity with this way of remembering before he declares that he feels at home in a house called 'The Butterfly House':

It is alive in all its bits and pieces,
Organic and inorganic, breathing together.
At night our spirits fly on dusty wings,
Lepidopterous, antennae'd souls.
And that is why I feel at home.

(E, p. 11)

The heightened language which ends 'The Butterfly House' alludes directly to rhetorical emblematisations of the world evident in other elegiac verse. The equation of a room with 'everywhere' and then the claim that the room is 'organic' links Dunn to John Donne's elegies. Although similar Dunn's contemporary rhetoric is distinctly different from Donne's in the way it explores the indifference of society to the wonderful and exotic. John Donne wrote rhetorically about memory in order to communicate public insight. In 'A Funerall Elegie' commissioned by the parents of Elizabeth Drury Donne interests himself in 'what the world contains' and how the loss will affect the smooth running of the world:

... The world contains
 Princes for armes, and Counsailors for braines,
 Lawyers for tongues, Divines for hearts, and more,
 The Rich for stomachs, and for backes the Pore;
 The Officers for hands, Merchants for feet
 By which remote and distant Countries meet.
 But those fine spirits, which doe time and set
 This Organ, are those peeces which beget
 Wonder and love; And these were shee; and shee
 Being spent, the world must nedes decrepit be.^[274]

Donne criticises the world's continuation in its mundane business by implying its indifference to the demise of wonder and love. The poet adopts the tone of the moraliser who can see the serious consequences of the loss of wonder and love, but avoids any attempt to suggest a solution. As we have seen, Douglas Dunn is more personally affected by the insight his grief is giving into the cruelties and wrongs of humanity. The organic world engages his whole being:

And that is why I feel at home, but feel
 That the large percentage of me that is water
 Is conspiring to return to the sea,
 Or to the river, flowing in its own shapes,
 It, too, alive in the long room of its being.

(E, p. 11)

Dunn's reference to the fact that each human being is made up of a large percentage of water makes him part of a larger scene. Equally the poet is prepared to accept that there is a conspiracy against his own involvement with the world present in his grief. At the same time the fact that his water-content will return to the sea implies the poet is not distant from the organic world.

To read poets like Peter Porter and Douglas Dunn, who have been prompted to write elegy by personal memories of their dead wives, is to find a modern use of rhetorical elegiac verse. Continual reference to elegiac tradition clarifies Dunn's particularly innovative 'amending of poetic forms in order to bring them into line with the possibilities for poetic use of the language of the day'.^[275]

Dunn is not afraid of amalgamating different styles of writing within one elegy or of amalgamating references to different art forms (for example poetry and painting, photography, and music). The amalgamation suits his subject since Lesley Dunn was an artist herself. The mixture of genres evident in *Elegies* highlights Dunn's ability to conflate the many levels of experience and language which are present in remembering. For example in

'Transblucency' (E, p. 49) the sound of a singer is treated as if it is an allegory for life, art and beauty. The many 'blue's' which introduce this poem have varied significance. One refers to blueness in music (the 'blue fog' of Duke Ellington's jazz evokes a melancholy mood). Another implies the chameleon nature of sound as it changes 'from blue to blue, and into deep / Sub-oceanic blue beyond the eye'. Dunn has made up his title from three words; the prefix trans-, blue and lucidity. A possible meaning for this word might be 'across blueness to clarity'. (The quotation from Duke Ellington offers a more eloquent definition.) The word 'sublime' is the rhyme Dunn chooses to complete the 'long rhyme' portraying his wife's life. Reasons why Dunn makes a connection between these words are suggested in the lines which are enclosed by the rhyme:

This sound portrays her life as one long rhyme.
 Its nervous elegance
 Calls with a woman's voice
 In the key of serenity
 That art is love, and beauty is
 Our commonplace sublime.

(E, p. 49)

The word 'commonplace' coupled with 'sublime' demands comment and helps us to understand why Dunn is manipulating the sound of jazz so that it becomes a voice of artistic theory as well as the echo of his wife's life. The word 'commonplace' is more suited to the style of jazz Dunn celebrates in other poems. In 'An Address to Adolphe Sax in Heaven' (NL, pp. 71-75) Dunn celebrates famous jazz artists (particularly saxophonists) and their contribution to art in a cruder style:

Lucky, Lockjaw, Dexter, Konitz
 Brought oompah'd art to that fine pitch
 Where music's an erotic itch
 A fingernail's too blunt to scratch.

(NL, pp. 73-74)

The 'Address' is a satirical attack on the snobbishness and puritanism of those Parisian experts who 'feared it was the sound of sex they heard' in the first saxophone performances. Denied 'a symphonic part' the music and sound was relegated to common places, 'Ballroom, night-club and bawdy house'. Declaring in 'Transblucency' that the sound of a soprano can communicate the idea that 'beauty is our commonplace sublime', Dunn uses a critically derided 'common' art to argue that the sublime is present in his everyday experience of listening to taped music. (Frequency of experience is another interpretation

of the word 'commonplace'.) The poet makes us take jazz seriously by moulding into the word 'woman' references to more than the sounds produced by a jazz singer. The sound also portrays Lesley Dunn's 'life' and echoes the use of the word 'woman' which we find in Thomas Hardy's elegy 'The Voice'.^[276] The parallels between Dunn's and Hardy's vocabulary are too close to be ignored, and yet the literary reference does not detract from the psychological working of memory we witness in 'Transblucency'. Investigating the links between Keats and Shakespeare John Middleton Murry focused on the traces of Shakespeare's style which he called 'memory' in Keats' poetry. Murry's application of the word 'memory' to cross references between literary texts suggests that literary citations need not be disruptive:

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one that was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.^[278]

Having been drawn to observe the parallel usage of 'woman' in the elegy of Dunn and Hardy, it is primarily their differences which prove important. The sound of a 'woman's voice' in 'Transblucency' is more obviously an artistic creation than Hardy's. The soprano's taped sound 'calls *with a woman's voice*' [my italics] while Hardy tries to persuade us of the reality of his 'Woman' and her relentless calling. Dunn heightens his artistic self-consciousness at this point to emphasise the potentially figurative interpretation of all his experience of grief. The word 'woman' becomes an allegory for life itself for Dunn:

When we say 'man' or 'woman' we know what we mean: everything they do, everything that can happen to them; thoughts, feelings, events, controversies, transactions, delights and tragedies. 'Man' and 'Woman' mean not merely gender, but life itself. To treat either cipher with disrespect is to risk inhumanity.^[279]

Dunn plays on the restlessness of the woman singer. The poet revitalises the word 'pain' in a way which recalls jazz lyrics, the populist tone replacing the theoretical language that was threatening to substitute itself for the intimate pain which the sound signifies to the poet:

Hear how it disregards injustice
For the intimate, for the lived,
For the pain of the species.

I play it again: I play it again.
 Most nights I listen to aesthetic pain
 Oozed through a block speaker,
 Appropriate, uncanny, kind to me.

(E, p. 49)

The play between the rhyme of 'rhyme' and 'sublime' has been exchanged for a different pattern. The word 'pain' moves via internal rhymes with 'again'. Dunn is drawing on the shuffling rhymes that jazz lyrics use to vary the significance of words.* The interplay between the words 'pain' and 'again' is eventually ended by pain's association with the word 'aesthetic'. The sound he hears 'disregards' 'injustice', choosing to focus on 'pain' instead. Disregard may seem unforgivable from a poet who insists that 'all art is social'.^[280] However, closer analysis reveals that Dunn's art remains socially concerned even while it champions the 'intimate' and 'lived'. Dunn makes an effort to expand the scope of pain to the experience of a 'species' rather than limit it to his own personal experience. Through listening to 'aesthetic pain' Dunn experiences a special kinship with humanity. Clearly, Dunn's writing about mourning involves keeping alive an 'aesthetic' awareness of 'pain' which feeds the poet's social consciousness.[†] Music also has the capacity to transport the poet beyond pain into a world of loving memories:[‡]

In autumn by the Tay when the geese are flying
 I am a man remembering love
 And the tune of her funeral.
 The lights of Newport rinse in the tide,
 Then one by one disperse, as life dissolves
 Into the deity within ourselves.

(E, p. 49)

The clarity of this picture is startling after the sense of thick and dark blackness created

★ We can see this point clearly if we examine Cole Porter's song 'You'd be so nice to come home to'. In this song the word nice is slowly shuffled to make a rhyme at the end of a line. The first two lines centre the word 'nice' so that it harmlessly refers to domestic comforts 'You'd be so nice to come home to / You'd be so nice by the fire'. In lines 7 and 8 the word is used in a full rhyme which reveals the deeper significance craved by the speaker, 'You'd be so nice / You'd be paradise / To come home to and love'.

† Terry Eagleton discusses the ideology of the aesthetic in his most recent book. At one point he focuses on how a feeling of benevolence relates to our role in a social structure. 'Is there even any need for some cumbersome apparatus of law and the state, yoking us inorganically together, when in the genial glow of benevolence we can experience our kinship with others as immediately as a delectable taste?'^[281]

‡ Listening to recorded Bach in 'Loch Music' (SKP, p. 79) Dunn also emphasises the changes music can bring about within his life. He felt his 'life transferred / Beyond the realm of where I am / Into a personal extreme'.

by aesthetic pain which 'oozed through a black speaker'. The sudden change is in keeping with an aesthetic imagination. Matthew Arnold attempted to describe some of the workings of the 'aesthetic imagination'.^h

The single and apparently effortless expression rejoices the aesthetic imagination at the moment when it is most expectant and exacting, and at the same time astonishes the intellect with a new aspect of truth.^[283]

After the turgidity of 'aesthetic pain' the clarity of the poet standing by the Tay 'remembering love' is astonishing. The poet's kinship with 'the species' is transformed by his memories of love. Noticing the 'lights of Newport' (that is, a highly populated habitation) 'rinse' and 'disperse' in the tide does not make the poet despair.^o Dunn absorbs the lights of Newport into 'the deity within ourselves.' The word 'deity' implies godliness and supremacy, even as to have these things 'within ourselves' denies that such a deity is aloof.

As we have seen, as Dunn listens to sound he recovers memories which acknowledge the spiritual and mysterious dimensions present in ordinary experience. In autumn by the Tay he remembers 'love / And the tune of her funeral'. The combination stimulates an awareness of 'the deity within ourselves'. To read the same moment in 'Leaving Dundee' is to recognise that the awareness of infinite things in Dunn's self-consciousness is associated with panic as well as a soothing love:

A small blue window opens in the sky
As thunder rumbles somewhere over Fife.
Eight months of up-and-down – goodbye, goodbye –
Since I sat listening to the wild geese cry
Fanatic flightpaths up autumnal Tay,
Instinctive, mad for home – make way! make way!

(E, p. 64)

Thunder is an angry threatening sound as well as being a forerunner to a clear sky. Hearing this sound the poet remembers the surging desire to leave which the geese represented

^h Arnold's piece is part of a discussion of what constitutes 'pure poetry'.^[282] It is of particular relevance for the study of Dunn's elegy since in 'The Stories' (E, p. 58) Dunn suggested that he was 'dedicated to the one pure elegy'. 'Transblucency' (E, p. 49) displays a spirited attempt to recover a 'sublime', a word which is itself sometimes associated with purifying. In 'Transblucency' Dunn seems to need to be cleansed of the blocking blackness of pain.

^o In 'Loch Music' (SKP, p. 79) the poet had used the verb 'disperse' to refer to the effect music gives him of the dissolution of his own life. 'I nourish nothing with the stars, / With minerals, as I disperse, / A scattering of quavered wash / As light against the wind as ash.' For Dunn, Bach offers a 'truth that's rich and physical'; as a consequence the death which Bach's music suggests is one in which the soul adheres to and frees itself from ritual.

to him. 'A small blue window' is a trivial reality used to express a sense of infinity and impending mental calm. The image recalls advice Baudelaire offered about creating a sense of the infinite:

The best way of giving an impression of infinite distance is to show the endless depths of sky framed in a small opening, set between chimneys or seen through the limiting outline of a window or grating. . . the sense of striving towards perfection is best given not through philosophical or emotional abstractions but through the suggestive use of the trivial, frail and limited objects of the world as we know it.^[284]

In *Elegies* Dunn's idea of the metaphysical is best approached through a study of his use of light. In many of Dunn's elegies light retains 'the essence of concentration', to quote John Mole,^[285] that Baudelaire's choice of a 'small opening' implies. Rather than concentrating on material objects to effect impressions of infinite distance, Dunn concentrates on his wife and the significance of light he associates with her. Combination of mist, fog, night, dusk and light are used in *Elegies* to imply a religious consciousness. Standing alone at night Dunn listens so hard that he believes in 'an opening of doors':

What rustles in the leaves, if it is not
What I asked for, an opening of doors
To a half-heard religious anecdote?

(E, p. 47)

By comparing the treatment of light as a religious anecdote in an elegy by Geoffrey Hill and one by Dunn, I shall argue for the human warmth which touches all Dunn's religious anecdotes. In 'In Piam Memoriam'^[286] Hill writes a verse which reflects the purity of an unnamed saint's image seen in a stained glass window. Stanza I maintains the speaker's emotional disconnection from the image:

Created purely from glass the saint stands,
Exposing his gifted quite empty hands
Like a conjurer about to begin,
A righteous man begging of righteous men.^[287]

The verb 'exposing' implies that the speaker finds something rather distasteful in the way the saint is remembered by a pose which asks for a response. The writer's/speaker's determination to stamp out anything divine in the image is evident in the tight control over the verse exercised by rigid rhymes ('stands' and 'hands'), and by the carefully placed simile. As the poem continues the memory of the saint's purity stirs with life almost in despite of the speaker's efforts and the attitudes of the world:

In the sun lily-and-gold-coloured,
 Filtering the cruder light, he has endured,
 A feature for our regard; and will keep;
 Of worldly purity the stained archetype.^[288]

The endurance in the man's face cannot be suppressed, it is 'a feature for our regard' which belongs to infinity. The light at the centre of Hill's poem (the poem is composed of three stanzas) reflects the limited access that writing can give to a realm of endurance and purity. The moment lightly glimpsed in a window in memory of a saint moves feebly in the environment:

The scummed pond twitches. The great holly-tree,
 Emptied and shut, blows clear of wasting snow,
 The common, puddled substance: beneath,
 Like a revealed mineral, a new earth.^[289]

The new life begins in the snows of winter and Christmas but it looks towards the crucifixion rather than the nativity. The images belong to a winter's scene and 'The great holly-tree' provided Christ's crown of thorns. It is the lack of personal engagement with memorial and environment which seems to contribute to the soulessness in Hill's elegy, even while it tries to engage with immortality. In 'At Cruggleton Castle' (E, p. 31) Dunn filters light through glass before his memory of his wife manifests innocence, purity and divine light:

The trees stepped back into a giant mist.
 A razorbill was a little lookout
 In the binoculars, alone on its ledge.
 Green, blue and yellow, the Bay dealt
 Its sunken mirrors under the little boats
 In a shuffle of sea glass.

(E, p. 31)

The bay seems created purely from glass and there is an unsavoury sense created by the way that the colours of nature are distorted at the whim of game-like powers in the natural environment. ('Dealt' and 'shuffle' remind us of cards.) In the coldly reflected moment Dunn dispays limited contact with his subject; he admits he is focusing on it through binoculars. The environment begins by shying away from expressing personality, the trees stepping back implies they are taken aback. There is, however a beautiful surprise at the centre of the poem:

A Gallovidian palette, colourist,
 Gathered in its greeny pinks and evening blues
 From the light in the middle of our lives.
 Good minutes make good days. Good days make years.

(E, p. 31)

The light which Dunn places at the centre of his poem implies that spiritual rebirth is possible by focusing on memory of love and gentleness. This insistence on making affection, fidelity and admiration, keeps the artistic pre-occupation with writing images of memory from sounding pretentious. In 'At Castle Cruggleton' Dunn makes it clear that he wants the light his wife inspires to lead 'through and beyond' by writing about light at the centre of his poem, and suggesting that the colours of the scene gather their magical beauty from lives enlightened by the knowledge love brings.*

The association of light with artistic memories leads us to consider the impact of Lesley Dunn's light on Dunn's style of mourning. John Mole suggests that Lesley's Dunn's light brings her husband's verse down to earth:

When Dunn does employ conscious literary artifice, even pastiche, it seems part of a serious game the couple might have played together, a mode of heightening the pleasures of living in the knowledge that 'art is love' In 'Anniversaries' there is direct allusion which combines John Donne's 'The Anniversarie' and 'The Relique': 'That day will still exist / Long after I have joined you where / Rings radiate the dusty air / And bangles bind each powdered wrist' but such referential hyperbole is set up only to be brought down to common earth, and Lesley's own words – 'Write out of me, not out of what you read' echo throughout *Elegies*.^[291]

A poem which both supports and confutes Mole's idea that artistic reference is 'part of a serious game the couple might have played' is 'Writing With Light'. The poem raises several interesting questions, including the problem every poet faces about putting silent moments or elements (like light) into words:

And as for art, then she could write with light,
 A rational, surreal photography
 Reconjuring a world in black and white –
 A pond in a box, a tabletop of sea.
 I see her in the dark, writing with light.

(E, p. 23)

* Heaney draws attention to the potential of writing the mystery of light into poetry when he examines Shakespeare's sonnet 60. Some poems he explained 'have openings at their centre which take the reader through and beyond. Shakespeare's sonnet 60 for example. . . "Nativity once in the main of light"'.^[290]

Dunn has learnt from his wife the ability to see life as an art which can be rational as a still life or as troublesome to reason as a surreal photograph. The poem focuses on remembered images of his wife which have affected the poet's craft and perception:

A *dadaiste* tomboy, she'd fill a jar
Then hold it to the sun. The art of day
Leapt on the shapely glass, the unfamiliar
Blues, changes, clouds, a watery display
That calmed and caught clear heavens in a jar.

And damn the hand washing. She'd run the tap,
Filling her jar, then hold it to the sun.
That contemplated water formed a trap
To catch the sun with. Experimental fun –
A jar, a sky, the flowing cold, a tap.

(E, p. 23)

'Water' and 'light' inspire a poem that is the representation of an artistic perspective. Dunn remembers the artistic games his wife played as the place where the civilised, discriminating faculties (such as the 'contemplated water' civilised by a 'tap') and the sense of the elemental (the blue 'clear heavens') reinforce each other.

Photography is not always a positive art. In 'Château d'If' (E, p. 32) Dunn looks at the purpose of light as he examines the quality of photographic memory, and how this harsher light treats memories of the past:

Her photographs of white embrasure glow
Against impossible blue, the sea and sky
Contemptuous of how men fortify
The State's iniquity.

(E, p. 32)

The parts which make up the picture issue an emotional commentary, the blue is 'impossible', the sea and sky 'contemptuous'. However, it is the humanity in the photography which Dunn chooses to develop rather than the grievances there. He rhymes 'know' with the word 'glow' which initially communicated anger. The verb 'know' introduces the sounds and rhythms of a calm voice. Dunn's usage also parodies part of Hardy's poem 'At Castle Boterel'. Where Hardy writes:

What we did as we climbed, and what we talked of
Matters not much, nor to what it led.^[292]

Dunn rewrites as:

I do not know
Exactly all we talked about or did.

(E, p. 32)

Comparing these lines reveals gaps of time between Dunn's and Hardy's elegy. The images of memory are given different effects. We could argue that it is the photographic nature of memory's images which create the differences. Dunn's words seem to remove the pathos of grief and guilt from Hardy's lines. There is concern hidden in Hardy's 'Matters not much' – a sense that it matters a great deal to the poet to recall what they did talk about. Hardy's lines imply that he could have remembered exactly what they said and did if he wanted to, that memory is part of a chain of events inside his head. Dunn's grief comes from the fact that he cannot remember exactly, the image seems to let him down:

I can't remember, but I can't forget
Our outing to the Château d'If, kept now
In these rectangles of a printed light,
Other than that she liked the day, and how
She said she'd read that book of martyrdom.
"Let's stay awhile, then take the last boat home."

(E, p. 32)

Dunn's use of light in association with memory allows him to combine an ordinary outing with a sense of a religious cause (held in the word 'martyrdom'). His poem is not about 'martyrdom' any more than it is about 'The State's iniquity', but the general suffering and injustice presented by these words. Poetry throws light on the false self-importance of these words by recording that the photographs are transformed into 'rectangles of light'.

The connection between Dunn's abstract conjuring of clarity behind the obliqueness of 'iniquity' and a European scene (such as Château D'If) significantly suggests that his art turns easily from the local to the European. The ability to reach a European past while being an English poet by striking 'elegiac notes for and posthumous to European civilisation' is beautifully evaluated by Seamus Heaney:

Poets who live and breathe their art in England now know that this note is proper to the world we have come to inhabit, to the extent that our own recent history of consumerist freedom and eerie nuclear security seems less authentic to us than the tragically tested lives of those who live beyond the pale of all this fiddle.^[293]

Although Dunn does not draw as heavily as Tony Harrison from the wealth of poetry available from Eastern Europe, elegies such as 'Château d'If' represent a place and age beyond the local and present; the association of Château and photograph as represen-

tative moments of Lesley Dunn's life implies that she too is 'beyond all this fiddle'. In Dunn's elegies the dead person is often seen to inhabit a real and abstract world simultaneously. The world within which the deceased finds himself or herself contextualised and the relationship between that world and the poet who has created it questions the scope of personal memory and record. Dunn was deeply impressed by Larkin's position in the controversy which took place in the sixties over the scope the personality of the poet could cover in contemporary poetry:

From his work in *The Less Deceived* onwards, what Larkin was involving himself with, probably unconsciously, was an effort to return poetry to its social lucidity on one hand, a deserved mystery and lyricism on another, and, more intimately, to insist on the lucidity and truth of himself by himself. Some commentators were quick to claim that Larkin's poetry was as a consequence wilfully low brow and provincial: it was reintroducing personality into poetry, when the prevailing dogma in the Academy asserted the impersonality of modernism. . . .

In reading Larkin in the early sixties, I noticed the extent to which he used the materials of his own life for his narratives and concerns. His poetry crossed the barrier of reticence all right, but had it gone too far?^[294]

Dunn's question suggests that while absorbing Larkin's example he intends to approach the 'surrounding the first person singular' in his own unique way. The use of personal memory in elegy provides the ultimate test for this. 'December's Door (In Memoriam Philip Larkin)' was written a year after Larkin's death. The poem was first presented along with the essay *Under the Influence* at the annual winter meeting of the Friends of Edinburgh University Library on 2 December 1986; and the two together make an important statement on Dunn's 'reinterpretation of recent poetry and the poetry of the past'. 'December's Door' begins with the poet assimilating his personal memory of the poet with a 'leaf'; controlling his feeling by turning memory to memorabilia:

That leaf still marks my place, but it was worn
Before I put it there; now dust
Dirties the page, and sinews, strong as thorn,
Impress the paper's softer crust,
Fragments hanging from them, leaves of a leaf
Preserved into a second autumn.
Afterwards' keepsake, its botanic grief
Crumbles in death's ad infinitum.

(NL, p. 31)

The attempt to be reticent about his personal feeling (the leaf becomes more significant than the feelings of 'I') becomes a powerful and rich expression of personal loss. The book is sentient it feels the sinews 'Impress the paper's softer crust', and this only serves

to emphasise the difference between life and death, the different experiences of the living and dead poet. So often the nature of elegiac verse is seen to express personal grief at the loss of a friend in ways which seem to bar the death from offering much that is positive or appreciative of any eternities. 'December's Door' begins with a wish 'I kept a church leaf, wishing it were blossom' which seems heavy with plaintive hope for the impossible. The 'I' seems burdened by grief for a friend. Larkin's memory demands a verse which strains to break the silence of poets left in oblivion and where 'I' remains a powerful but background presence:

Sorrow's vernacular, its minimum,
 A leaf brought in on someone's shoe
 Gatecrashed the church in muffled Cottingham,
 Being's late gift, its secret value
 A matter of downtrodden poetry,
 Diminutive, and brought to this
 By luck of lyric and an unknown tree.
 A passer-by was bound to notice
 Crisp leaves at work when everyone had gone,
 Some fricative on paving-stones
 As others flecked the winter-wrinkled lawn,
 Remote, unswept oblivions.

(NL, p. 31)

There is a sharpness and bustle to these lines which is a refreshing treatment of memory of the dead. Dunn shatters the normally stifling reverential silence of churches with the word 'gatecrashed', and the general noisiness of the leaves 'crisp', 'fricative'. However to gatecrash is also the act of the opportunist, and suggests that Dunn feels he breaks rules. Dunn's use of a 'leaf' to assimilate Larkin's memory and to discuss the power of an all-embracing 'vernacular' language of 'Sorrow', moves personal memory into a mythic realm. The leaf serves to show how a spirit of poetry connected with an individual can survive. Dunn preserves a sense of personal influence because the leaf has been used earlier to evoke Larkin's memory. In this stanza he equates 'A leaf' with a style of writing, 'Sorrow's vernacular'. The simplicity of rhyme and use of ordinary observations aim to acknowledge Larkin's poetic personality: 'what influenced me heavily was the up-to-dateness of observation in Larkin's verse'. At the same time it expresses the way in which 'sorrow' gives insight into Dunn's own poetic personality. Dunn tantalises the reader with a style of poetry which manages to work a reticent personal memory 'I kept a church leaf', into an abstract, overtly philosophical realm of interpretation ('Sorrow's vernacular, its minimum, / A leaf brought in on someone's shoe'). It is tantalising because the

assertiveness of the final stanza seems to suggest that the poet has touched upon soothing 'secret' properties of 'Sorrow' by projecting the significance of Larkin's memory beyond the ordinary personal realms of being into a verbal eternity of 'Sorrow's vernacular'. The poet's emphasis on the chance glimpse of other realms of knowledge that memory provides 'By luck of lyric and an unknown tree' is frustrating too. Dunn uses elegiac memory to believe in a poet's ability to reach other realms of knowledge (even if this is fitful). The tantalising sense of a being (just beyond the reach of understanding) that Dunn's use of memory creates in *Elegies* is a particularly important cause of the painful sorrow expressed by the 'grievous' verse he writes there. Dunn's positive attempts to hope for personal contact with another person's lost being marks an unusual and challenging use of memory in elegy when compared with the direction taken by other contemporary poets. As we have seen, Dunn's use of memory is part of a strongly held belief that art can and should try to communicate lovingness and humanity.

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§1 TONY HARRISON

The first section of this bibliography is a guide to Tony Harrison's work as it is cited in this thesis. It covers most of the books he has published in English as well as some of his theatre, television, critical and journal work. For a more extensive reader's guide to Harrison's work (including many more of his contributions to journals, magazines, anthologies and critical books), see Neil Astley's 'Selective Bibliography' published in *Tony Harrison*, edited by Neil Astley (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1991), and John R. Kaiser's *Tony Harrison: A Bibliography 1957-1987*, published by Mansell Publishing in 1989.

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